

Performance Matters

Moving Together to Reclaim and Resist: Podcast and Podcast Transcript

Jenn Cole, Melissa Poll, Alana Gerecke, Elan Marchinko, Jill Carter, Julie Burelle, Kelsey Blair, Ken Wilson, Kimberly Richards, Virginie Magnat et Selena Couture

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Performing (in) Place: Moving on/with the Land

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EDITORIAL NOTES

Moving Together to Reclaim and Resist: Podcast Transcript

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Jenn Cole

Ambient Audio: Sounds of the city, traffic and trucks, mixed with bird song.

Aniin, Bozhoo, Kwei Kwei, everybody. Welcome to our land acknowledgment podcast, being on the land.

Hi, I'm Jenn Cole, a mixed ancestry Algonquin, Anishinaabe from Kiji Sibi territory, which is the territory of the Ottawa River watershed. My grandparents grew up around Mattawa, in the bush around that area off-reserve.

I live right now in Michi Saagig territory, in the Nogojiwanong or Peterborough. I obviously couldn't say in one moment all my relationships to this place. They're good! Right now, I have spruce tips on the stove, making spruce tip syrup so that I can have medicine for my family in the winter and share it with my community here. Also, I just had eggs with wild leeks that are harvested from this territory.

I get to be associate artistic producer and director with Marie Mumford at Nozhem First Peoples Performance Space. Marie has really folded me into the Indigenous arts community here. I'm very thankful for that, for how much I am learning about myself as an Anishinaabe-kwe and as an Indigenous artist and as a supporter of arts and teacher here in this place. I'm also working quite a bit lately with Marie's daughter, Cara Mumford, who's a beautiful filmmaker. They're Métis, Plains Chippewa. I've been working, too, with William Kingfisher making art. He's from Rama First Nation. Making with these people according to our protocols and ways of living and being in the world is special. It's really nourishing. I am thankful to be able to enact my relationships to many beings by making work in this territory, in relationship with many beings. It's pretty cool.

Just to the west of me is the Otonabee Bay River, the river that bubbles like a beating heart. She doesn't bubble so much anymore, and Leanne Simpson writes quite a bit about this. She's Michi Saagig. The lift lock system and the establishment of the Trent Southern Waterway [and] also logging practices in this community and on these lands have really changed the movement of the river. I think that pulse of her beating heart is obviously still present, and I think sometimes audible or sensible. I've learned a lot from being in relationship with that river, and she's carried me through a lot of transformation in my life and supported me and let me make my offerings and prayers, let me engage with my sovereign birthright as a woman to care for the water and to learn about what that responsibility means here away from my home territory.

If I think about land acknowledgment as saying who we are in relation, there's a lot. Dylan Robinson says land acknowledgment is situational and relational; it changes depending on who's in the room. Jill Carter calls us to treat land acknowledgment as a possibility for reworlding, which is amazing and a tall order, an amazing possibility or potential, I think.

Of course, I can't articulate all my relationships to this place in this moment, but I wanted to share some of them with you to show how deep and long and new they are. So, I think about developing relationship to place as a really long process. I don't think the only relationship we might have to place is "I'm indigenous" or "I'm settler" or "I'm mixed" or "I'm a newcomer." I can't imagine relationships to place stopping there. And maybe one way to become more responsible in connection to being in territory that isn't one's own or that is one's own is just to devote time to that practice and that process.

I'm not sure if land acknowledgment is becoming like a dirty term. This came up when Broadleaf Theatre was here doing their show, *The Chemical Valley Project*. That show's transformed a lot over the last few years. I've seen it in process. I think the first time I saw it was at the Chippewa of the Thames fundraiser at Buddies in Bad Times and they came to the theatre on King in the Nogojiwanong as part of a conference that I was organizing to workshop the show. We had a talk-back after their most recent version was here at Market Hall, brought in by Public Energy. The show now ends with an acknowledgment of the territory where the show is taking place in the moment, and they set that up with a bunch of context. One audience member, a woman from Curve Lake First Nation, I'm pretty sure, was like, "Why do you do that? What is it for?" I've seen a lot more resistance from Indigenous communities around land acknowledgment, not just asking them to be more meaningful, but interrogating what they're actually doing.

I've taught a lot of courses where we do a land acknowledgment assignment after reading the Carter, Robinson, and Recollet reading with lots of information built in. Students spend some time on the land and try to get to know a place for a little while and think about that experience. We're doing all this cool decolonizing work and then students who identify as settlers or who are just beginning to do that often . . . get really stressed out because they're like, what does it mean to be thankful or to say, like, may we honour those teachings when we don't know what the teachings are? The whole thing feels a bit disingenuous, disingenuous or like it's a bureaucratized protocol. And also, they're embarrassed; they feel guilty about not knowing enough about where they are, and they're just arriving into this territory to go to university, a lot of them.

So, I think that's a really productive place to be, and I hope to coax them through some of those questions and to say, look, it's hard sometimes to acknowledge that we're just beginning to understand who we are in relation or we're just beginning to get to know the real . . . the Indigenous histories of these places where we're living. I think about what land acknowledgment means to them. It feels very heavy to a lot of them, and a lot of them do brilliant, thoughtful work about how to de-bureaucratize this protocol we're all living with right now.

I've also seen Indigenous students blow up that assignment, and these students are young and cumulatively fatigued by experiencing violence, experiencing colonial violence in academic spaces, and having people do a land acknowledgment first. This makes me think I need to rethink that assignment and write blowing up the land acknowledgment into the assignment guidelines.

I'm not sure what it means to not do the work but to give the land acknowledgment. When I was working with William Kingfisher on ENAWENDEWIN/RELATIONSHIPS in the community garden, he was like, don't we acknowledge the land by just being on the land?

And they're two different things for me. I think about a land acknowledgment partly in connection to the roll-out of reconciliation discourse. I think about it also just in connection to the protocol of

meeting someone and saying who you are, really honestly. And then they say who they are, honestly. And then you are on a footing where you're building your trust through being transparent, showing who you are, speaking from the heart. I think doing that is incredibly powerful, and it's a skill that we're learning. I'm learning a lot about that in my own life, about speaking from the heart and being thoughtful at the same time and showing who I am, which is really vulnerable. It's a very vulnerable thing to do. But also, it doesn't have to be so solemn or heavy-handed as it sometimes becomes, I don't think.

These are just some of my thoughts right now and thinking about moving on the land or moving in territory, creating these embodied practices of walking at this CATR conference for me, partly has to do with trying to get to understand where we are in place a little bit, especially because we do this parachuting into places, and we don't ask to be invited. We arrive with entitlements, and there's no one who's offered us welcome necessarily. I could talk about this for a very long time. It's a way of doing the work of learning where we are in place, learning where we are in connection to our relationships with the others in that place. Beginning that work and doing it through an embodied performance practice, because that's one of the ways that I and others in the CATR community relate and connect to the world. Something can happen there. I think these walks have been really different, depending on where they've happened and what our relationships to those places are.

And when Melissa asked if we could start a working group and she was thinking a lot about the walks as land acknowledgment, I realized that that had been a condition, that had been a piece of the walks, knowing the First Nations from that territory, being able to say their names or stumble through them and then being kind of caught in the limits of our knowledge, so being able to acknowledge really honestly how little we know about where we are. Or maybe sometimes what our own personal history is in that place. And sometimes, for some people, that has been deeply connected. We each bring our own experiences to the places where we are.

I was cautious, though, to have our walking practice so closely and theoretically linked to land acknowledgment because of resistance I've seen from different Indigenous folks around territory acknowledgment. And these folks will like, say, who they are when they meet other people. They're not doing that part of protocol. I've seen them do this publicly.

I think the rote acknowledgment is starting to get us down. I think it's exciting to be able to think through what it means. I don't think it's time to throw it out yet because it's such a bare minimum act. But I do wonder about it, and I am taking space to wonder about it in my academic practice. I think the thing we do when we acknowledge territory when we're hosting a group is important to do and is important to do in whatever heartfelt, honest, personally invested ways that we can.

Lisa Ravensbergen's welcome and teachings generously share teachings about being in connection with land and giving to the land and giving ourselves time for ceremony. Offering intention, what we intend to do while we're there. What gift it is that we're bringing for that place. That was powerful for me and really exciting.

Yeah, I guess I think of that thing that we do when we're hosting, we're offering welcome, and we're saying where we are. I like the opportunities that that practice creates.

I also think the real work of acknowledgment might be developing relationship to place, and relationship to the communities in that place, however we might think of communities, so that might be human and that might be non-human. And then to be changed by those relationships, to

look for where we might be being asked to step into responsibility or to develop a personal practice that comes out of intuition or out of information from our spirits about how to say thank you every day. How to become conscious about how we are connected in place. How we are supported, sustained, nourished by the places we inhabit.

Melissa Poll

Ambient audio: Bird songs, babbling brook, sounds of footsteps and snippets of conversation with my toddlers as we walk the Konza Prairie.

My name is Melissa Poll, my pronouns are she/her and I'm a settler descendant. I'm the co-convenor of Moving Together to Reclaim and Resist with my wonderful collaborator Jen Cole.

I grew up in Treaty One Territory and the homeland of the Métis in the 1980s. That's where I learned to speak French, to tie a ceinture fléchée. But at that time, I couldn't have told you anything about the original inhabitants of that land. Now I spend my time between BC and Kansas, where my partner is a professor at Kansas State University.

Historically, Kansas has been home to many nations, including the Kaw, Osage, and Pawnee, as well as nations like the Delaware, who were moved through Kansas as part of the Indian Removal Act. Right now, Kansas is currently home to four federally recognized nations: the Prairie Band Potawatomi, the Kickapoo, the Iowa, and the Sac and Fox.

The audio background for this talk is me walking the Konza Prairie with my kids, who are one and three. They were born on this land, we occupy this land, and I'm still figuring out what it means to live in good relation to this territory. Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett discuss the importance of locating ourselves in our research. That's why I want to account for my positionality in this work and who I am.

One of the most impactful land acknowledgments that I've experienced happened at SFU, which is on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam (x^wməθk^wəy^{əm}), Squamish (S^kw^xwú7mesh), and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, but it spoke to the land in British Columbia more broadly. At the talk, after the sort of perfunctory land acknowledgment was given, a Wet'suwet'en land defender got up and talked about what was happening on the land, who had been arrested, and how they were fighting against the pipeline. It was visceral, breathless. It vibrated. And that made me think about what Jill Carter says about biotas and how we consider, you know, the health of the land. What's going on in the land that we're acknowledging.

The land that you hear on my walk is at the Konza Prairie Biological Station, which is one of two protected sites of Tallgrass prairie in Kansas. The amount of Tallgrass prairie remaining since before European settlement is estimated between 4 and 13 percent, with the majority still in the Flint Hills of Kansas.

For me, land acknowledgment is about reciprocity, how we're living in relation to the land and its people. For me, this has meant working with interested community members on trying to reimagine the high school mascot. The mascot is a generic plains "Indian," and the sports teams are referred to as the Manhattan "Indians." I also give my time weekly to the Prairie Band Potawatomi, who have so graciously welcomed me and made me feel like part of a family in this new place.

For a while, I'd been bothered by preperformance land acknowledgments delivered by settlers that just feel perfunctory. They're said alongside announcements to turn off your cell phone and unwrap your candies. There is a performative nature to it. It's performative ally-ship. In my postdoc research, I'm looking at how intercultural performance and performance-making processes can acknowledge the people, nations, and territories they occur on. From what I've observed, and somewhat obviously, Indigenous artists are in positions of agency directing, designing, and making the work when these collaborations happen in a good way. But where is *their* sovereign space in these projects? For Marie Clements's chamber opera *Missing*, there was an Indigenous-only table. This brought to mind David Garneau's "Spaces of Irreconcilable Aboriginality." It was a space of sovereignty, a space of respite from settlers and our hungry questioning.

I'm also thinking on how sustainability can be built into mandates and how theatre companies can engage Indigenous artists and local nations who are interested in making the land and its history accessible to patrons. This could happen via curated walks for spectators who want to know about the land they'll be occupying when they see a production.

I know I'm a hungry settler. I know I'm greedy. I've had this hunger to, in Dylan Robinson's words, "do the right thing" or "fit the Indigenous into a multicultural mosaic." I'm working against this. My intention these days is listening, a sated listening. It's an engaged listening.

Alana Gerecke

Ambient Audio: Rain pelts against the sidewalk, umbrella, and street. It is a heavy, constant rain, cut with the occasional sound of a car engine or a passer-by.

You can't see me right now, but if you could, you would see arms moving, extending upward, reaching, catching a drop here, tracing it as it rolls down arm, armpit, left side, hip, past the knee back to the earth.

You would see me stoop, protecting my face from the rain. You would see me shuffle quickly, and you would see me surrender, tilt up, open my chest and feel those drops landing cold and fresh and nourishing on my skin. A whole-body surround sound, tingling-waking feeling here on the unceded traditional territories of the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples in the city colonially known as Vancouver. We get a lot of rain. I've been here for two decades. I came from away from Toronto or tkaronto, where my ancestors have been occupying land as uninvited guests for generations.

Coming into the rain helps me remember to notice the land that I am on and in and with. For me, a land acknowledgment is deeply about a physical, visceral, bone-deep sensation of the land, of this land that I am on right now, of the slope of the ground, of the texture underfoot, of the heat, of the cool of the wind, of the passers-by, the sounds around. And on many days here of the rain, as it falls, as it nourishes the plants, as it carries the water memory in cycles, the powerful drumming of the rain.

Elan Marchinko

Ambient Audio: The sounds and vibrations of movement and traffic at West 23rd Street and 10th Avenue, Chelsea, Manhattan, New York City.

Hi, my name is Elan Marchenko. I'm a fourth-generation Ukrainian settler-Canadian and a PhD candidate in performance studies at York University. Currently, though, I'm living in Manhattan, in New York City.

So here on the southern part of Turtle Island, I'm feeling viscerally the irony of being unable to cross the colonial border between the United States and Canada and of being welcome in neither of these settler nations, both of which are on stolen land to begin with.

I acknowledge that Manhattan, Manahatta, is the ancestral land of the Lenape Nation and home to the Rockaway and Canarsie people. I acknowledge that the borough of Manhattan continues to be home to many Indigenous nations, such as the Mohawk Ironworkers who built the skyline. I acknowledge that the Lenape named the Hudson River Mahicannituck because the river flows both ways but that they were evicted from their land under the guise of purchase and exchange. I acknowledge that the wall built to keep the Lenape out and the buttonwood tree under which stocks and bonds were exchanged is now known as what we call Wall Street.

I acknowledge that the Lenape, through forced migration, came to live in places such as New Jersey and Oklahoma, where they are known as the Delaware. And so Manahatta persists in multiple spaces. I acknowledge that for many, this land over which concrete is poured is never smooth but deadly. I acknowledge that after voices crack at exhaustion from saying their names that the land holds space for the memories of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Elijah McClain and too many others who die by the police and white supremacy. I acknowledge solidarity as we gather in an assemblage of bodies, breath and smudge across Manhattan, Harlem, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens.

I acknowledge kindness is tired organizers passing around hand sanitizer, orange slices and water.

I acknowledge the hauntology of viral, racial, and xenophobic contagion. I acknowledge that these unprecedented times are also preceded and sedimented.

We've been here before.

I acknowledge that this land, Manahatta, remembers this.

Jill Carter

Ambient Audio:

It must have been a good day!

Bineshiinyag nagamotaagdiwag.

The birds are singing to each other.

Someone's quite irritated this evening!

Ajidamoo nishkaadizi. The squirrel is angry!

Me and my big feet! I must have woken him up!

It is the 3rd of June, ode'imín-giizis, the moon of strawberries, and I am walking in tkaronto, Toronto, the place where the trees grow out of the water. I am walking into midnight, southwards along a ribbon of concrete that was once part of an ancient trail. As I walk, the moon hangs low in

the sky, dibik-giizis. Always hovering just ahead of me, beckoning me on and forward. Over my left shoulder rides Venus and behind me, now fading into the indigo sky, is Odjig, the Fisher Constellation, Ursa Major, the Big Bear, the Big Dipper. As I walk along this trail just west of Young Street, I search for marker trees, those foot traffic signals that still remain that have been left to us, the children who remain, by the Indigenous ancestors who walked these trails before us: the Erie, the Petun, the Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinabek and peoples, perhaps, of many, many nations, whose names I have not yet learned. These marker trees speak a language that I am only now beginning to recognize, although I cannot say that I have any fluency in this language or any understanding of the messages they relate. For now, it's enough. To seek, to find, to map, to search for patterns with the hope that one day I will understand some of that language.

Julie Burelle

Ambient audio: Wind on the bluffs, distant ocean waves.

I am standing here on the bluffs of what is now known as La Jolla in Southern California on the unceded territory of the Kumeyaay people. As Mike Conolly Miskwish, member of the Campo Kumeyaay Nation and teacher at San Diego State University, writes, “This land carries the footprint of millennia of Kumeyaay people.” They are a people whose traditional lifeways intertwined with a worldview of earth and sky in a community of living beings. This land is part of a relationship that has nourished, healed, protected, and embraced the Kumeyaay people to the present day. From the bluff today, I see these life forces at play. I see the earth and the sky. The ocean's dance is both visible and audible. I am surrounded by rare and resilient Torrey pines, a tree that grows here and in only a handful of other places on earth. The air is crisp. It is a truly magnificent place, and it has a lot to teach if one is willing to stop and listen. This is a process I'm deeply committed to.

I am not from here. I grew up on unceded Algonquin territory near what is now known as Gatineau. But I have called San Diego home for more than a decade now. In that time, I have learned from and have found inspiration in the long line of Kumeyaay artists, students, educators, storytellers, leaders, researchers, friends, and family members that stem from and are in relation to this land. I am a guest here, and this land acknowledgment is an expression of my deep gratitude. It is also a renewed commitment to being part of meaningful and tangible ways of the decolonizing project led by the Kumeyaay people and other Indigenous people around the world. To name what is with honesty, to listen and to allow oneself to be deeply unsettled as a settler is only the beginning of this relationship.

Kelsey Blair

Ambient audio: Footsteps in nature.

I'm walking on the traditional territories of the sc̓əwaθən məsteyəx^w (Tsawwassen First Nations) in the suburban town currently known as Ladner, British Columbia. My mother, Joan, was born here. When she tells childhood stories, they are filled with first and second generation southeastern European immigrants living in the mid-twentieth-century fishing and farming town. When my mom was a teenager, the Tsawwassen Nation longhouse was torn down by the provincial government as part of the BC ferry terminal construction.

Joan's father, Louis, was born in Croatia. He arrived on this territory on a fish boat but refused to make the return trip home. Joan's mother, Eda, was also born here in Ladner. Around the year of

Eda's birth, Tsawwassen Chief Harry Joe submitted a petition for more land to the McKenna-McBride Commission. It was denied. Eda's mother—Joan's grandmother—Catherine came to this territory from Italy. She arrived at approximately the same time as Indigenous peoples were excluded from commercial fishing by the Canadian government.

I have gone on a walk every single day since arriving on this territory. After crunching the math, I would guess that I have walked at least 750,000 steps, approximately 625 kilometres, in the last two months. This is coincidentally, but not insignificantly, the distance from the traditional territories of the Tsawwassen Nation to the traditional territories of the Kootenay Nation. My father, James, was born in the city currently known as Quesnel, in the traditional territories of the Kootenay Nation. Robert and Dorothy, James's parents, were both born near Quesnel. Robert's father, Hugh, my father's grandfather, came to this territory from Belfast, Ireland. At the same time, St. Joseph's Mission, which would eventually become a residential school, was opened just outside of what is currently known as Williams Lake. Dorothy's mother, Margaret, was born in what is now known as Quesnel, as was her mother, Carrie, who spent eight years at St. Joseph's Mission. Carrie's mother, Katla, was a member of the Lil'wat Nation. She was married to settler Marvin P. Elmore when she was sixteen. As directed by his business ambitions, Katla and Elmore moved to Quesnel, where Katla had seven children. In the 1880s, Katla took the two youngest children and fled. It is speculated that she returned home to be with her own family.

In walking the distance that anchors the two trunks of my family tree in the last two months, I have become acutely aware of my freedom of movement. My life is defined by mobility with and across land, nations, performance genres and academic fields. The degree of my mobility, untethered from domestic, familial, or societal obligation, is unprecedented for the women in my family. I am grateful for the hənqəmínəm-speaking people who have been stewards of this land since time immemorial. I am aware of the humans, animals, plants, and organisms in relation to whom I move. I recognize that I benefit from systems and histories of violence, colonialism, and white supremacy in particular that secure my movement through public space. I am more likely to be attacked by a pack of wolves than by humans or by the police. I know that these systems of violence mantle the scholarly, artistic, and sporting fields in which I work and play. I honour the women on both sides of my family tree whose mobility was often restricted and directed by others and the freedom of movement that their lives have indirectly granted me.

Ken Wilson

Ambient audio: The sound is of feet crunching on a gravel road, with traffic on the Regina Bypass in the distance, while birds sing nearby. Occasionally a vehicle passes on the road while I'm walking.

Spoken text:

Seven Questions about Embodied Territorial Acknowledgments

1. What would an embodied territorial acknowledgment on Treaty 4 land in southern Saskatchewan be like? Would it sound like the rhythm of feet trudging along a gravel grid road, or the fluting of western meadowlarks, or the ceaseless wind, or traffic on a distant highway? Would it feel like tired legs or sore feet, taste like the dust raised by passing vehicles, smell like lilacs growing in the shelterbelt of an abandoned home quarter? Would it look like a field of canola or the grassland that covered southern Saskatchewan before Settlers arrived with ploughs and steam tractors, or the bright blue of a prairie sky?

2. Is embodiment an adequate response to criticisms of spoken territorial acknowledgments—the arguments that they are just mundane “box-ticking” exercises, “easily ignored and void of learning opportunities,” or “moves to innocence” that attempt to claim legitimacy or absolution for Settlers’ occupation of the land while doing nothing to repatriate Indigenous land and life? Are embodied territorial acknowledgments better than nonperformative verbal acknowledgments, statements which sound nice but make nothing happen?
3. Is walking on the land an opportunity to learn from it, to enter into a relationship with it, as Cree Elders have told me?
4. Or are embodied territorial acknowledgments just as fraught as their verbal equivalents? When I’m walking on the land, am I just a colonizer inspecting the property?
5. If I want to acknowledge that Settlers have not lived up to our treaty obligations or to understand the land as sacred, do those intentions make any difference?
6. Are embodied territorial acknowledgments a way to grapple with this country’s ongoing practices of colonialism? Or are those practices too complex and deeply rooted for such acknowledgments to make much of a difference?
7. Are embodied territorial acknowledgments significant? Are they a tiny part of the unsettling that decolonization will require? At what point are micropolitics too small to make any difference?

Kimberly Richards

Ambient Audio: Outdoors, a horse trots, neighs, exhales and responds to his rider’s gentle words.

In Lethbridge yesterday, the wind gust at fifty miles per hour. I’ve blown away from my birthplace on several occasions, migrating with and without my family in the search for opportunity. Four months ago, I joined my mother on her four-acre acreage on the traditional lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy; it has been the longest phase I have stayed in this place since I was six. Two of my teachers during this time have been the curious horses I care for and ride in neighbouring farmlands.

In the past 117 days, I have ridden more miles than I have driven, my petro-fuelled ambitions replaced with a living engine sustained by grass and oats. We travel at a speed conducive to noticing daily shifts moderated by wind and sun and rain. We navigate the melting of snow and defrosting of earth and enjoy the migration of geese and the growth of new plant life.

We share in the responsibility of safe transport during our expeditions. In winter, I guide my steed to weave carefully between combined rows where the snow has drifted and ice has formed. In summer, we gallop head-on into the wind, bone balanced on bone, muscle on muscle, bud-da-dum, bud-da-dum.

I listen to the rhythm of his breath, I feel for the fluidity of his joints. My pedagogy consists of the gentle application of pressure, shifts in weight, squeezes of calves until rest is rewarded and the day is lived swishing tails, swatting flies, standing by the water tank, sipping and dripping, chug, chug, chug.

I wonder how many days it would take to ride to Writing-on-Stone, where the Blackfoot people carved renderings of the four-leggeds in stone—maybe three? Maybe four?

Years of farming by people who look like me has destroyed the abundance of native plants that once existed here. The horses do not discriminate between native and non-native plants but delight in the existence of each bush of alfalfa, each head of rye; they live in the moment, never consuming too much, content when they are full, concerned only when a storm is coming, or they spy a potential threat to their safety. They are animated only by the truth of the moment. They are humble about the smallness of their existence and their vulnerability in the world. Pleased with the smallest of gifts, they express their gratitude with trust and kindness.

Virginie Magnat

Ambient Audio: Waves crashing on a Vancouver Island beach.

Traditional song sung in Occitan.

My name is Virginie Magnat, and I shared with you a traditional song from Occitania, a vast territory that stretches from southwestern to southeastern France, where I was born and grew up.

Occitan was my grandparents' language, which was systematically suppressed by education policies that established French as the official national language. Consequently, my generation has been entirely cut off from its ancestral culture and language, which has greatly affected the oral transmission of traditional songs. I've had to piece together my intangible cultural heritage, one song at a time within the remaining fragments of the repertoire. When I reflect on what ancestry means to me, I think about my belonging to a working-class family whose lineage can be traced to generations of resourceful, resilient and strong-spirited peasants from remote rural communities in Occitania, while at the same time charting a different path for myself by being the first in my family to attend university, a personal trajectory that has led me to take on the hybrid identity of scholar-practitioner within the North American field of performance studies.

This journey began when, at the age of fifteen, I was fortunate to receive a merit-based two-year full scholarship to study at Lester B. Pearson United World College, a nonprofit institution promoting international understanding through education and located in the coastal forests of Vancouver Island. What I did not know at the time, however, was that this foundational experience, which literally changed the course of my life and continues to be a source of inspiration for my teaching, research, and creative work, took place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Scia'new First Nation, also known as the Beecher Bay Indian Band. When I was a student at Pearson College in 1982–84, there were no land acknowledgments. The history of colonialism in Canada was never discussed, and the two hundred young people from over sixty-five countries that had all been selected and granted full scholarships to attend this special school and live together on its stunningly beautiful campus were unaware that they were uninvited visitors.

In 2019, I decided to return to Pearson College to teach theatre and to take part in some of the belated yet much-needed initiatives that were underway in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action. The academic year opened with the first-ever official welcome by a representative of the Scia'new First Nation, Chief Councilor Russ Chips, who doesn't like prepared speeches because he believes it's much better to speak straight from the heart. In his welcome, he addressed the urgent need to strengthen the relationship between the college and his community and announced the creation of two scholarships specifically dedicated to Scia'new youth. This United World College was founded by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson in 1974, so it took forty-six years

for this historic event to unfold. And while I was extremely grateful to have been able to witness it in person, I wish I could have shared this moment with my friend Evan Adams from Sliammon First Nation in Powell River, BC. He was the only Indigenous student throughout our two years together at Pearson College.

In early March, the global pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization, and all Pearson College students were sent home. I experienced the lockdown at my own campus residence at Pearson College, which has given me time to reflect on how I might offer a land acknowledgment as my humble contribution to the development of a mutually beneficial relationship between my alma mater and the Scia'new First Nation, to whom I am forever indebted. My land acknowledgment, therefore, honours the Scia'new people whose main community is located on Beecher Bay in East Sooke, thirty kilometres southwest of Victoria and only ten kilometres from Pearson College. This community traces its ancestry to people who spoke four different languages. The predominant language is now *hənq̓əminəm*. The Scia'new First Nations website provides important information about the Douglas Treaties, which cover approximately 930 square kilometres, 360 square miles of land around Victoria, Saanich, Sooke, Nanaimo, and Port Hardy.

The Douglas Treaties specify that the signatories and their descendants would retain existing village sites and fields for their continued use, the liberty to hunt over unoccupied lands and the right to carry on their fisheries as formerly. Yet, despite these promises, Indigenous people on Vancouver Island and throughout British Columbia ended up having fewer rights, less land, and less protection than most of their counterparts in the rest of Canada. To redress these colonial injustices, the Scia'new First Nation has been negotiating with the government of Canada a mother land claim agreement under the British Columbia treaty process. Also, on December 10, 2018, the Scia'new First Nation signed a memorandum of understanding with the district of Metchosin and Pearson College to develop a common vision for the lands in which the college is situated, an accomplishment to which Chief Chips proudly referred when he welcomed students in August 2019.

My land acknowledgment, therefore, pays tribute to the Scia'new First Nation's courageous struggle for self-determination and self-government. Speaking from the heart, I express my hope that this First Nation will regain its rights to manage and control its beautiful ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory. I also hope that Pearson College develops and sustains a respectful, responsible, and reciprocal relationship with its Scia'new host and neighbour.

Selena Couture

Ambient audio: Bird song, footsteps on gravel, traffic in the far distance. Duck quacks a couple of times part-way through.

Hello. My name is Selena Couture, and I am a white settler speaking to you from the unceded, traditional and ancestral territories of the *hənq̓əminəm*-speaking *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* and *səlilwətaɬ* peoples and the *Skwxwú7mesh sníchim*-speaking *Skwxwú7mesh* peoples, currently known as Vancouver, British Columbia. This is the place where I've been learning how to be a respectful visitor who walks alongside Indigenous people, lands, and other-than-human beings.

I returned here on March 18 from Amiskwacîwâskahikan, Treaty 6 Territory /Métis Region No. 4, where I teach at U of A, which sits on the stolen Papaschase reserve lands, shortly after the pandemic was declared. I came back to shelter in place with my family in East Vancouver.

I say these words of acknowledgment as a way to be in better relation to the lands I occupy—and yet, while I’m saying them, hidden in a closet in my house, I’m also feeling the inadequacy of this exercise. I know where I am and why what I’m saying is important to me. I have no idea where you are—you the person listening to my words—nor do I know “when” you are or “who” you are in relation to the lands you are on while you’re listening. Acknowledging territory (as I’ve been learning from a settler positionality) is about grounding a gathering and clarifying the purpose of being together in a place, at a certain time, to do something and to foreground how *that* gathering might matter to *that* place. Without that synergy of embodiment in place, the words feel much more like a signalling that I’m not one of the bad white people . . . which, of course, mere words can’t prove in any way.

All this said, I do have an offering of sound and place for you, reflecting on being present in a complicated landscape where I have both found comfort and implication during the pandemic.

I often walk east of my house toward the Hastings Park Sanctuary, a wetlands project created by digging up old asphalt and removing buildings from the Pacific National Exhibition site. It’s a green growing place, and it smells like it. There are so many birds here—small yellow warblers quickly flashing and then disappearing, duck families paddling about and ducking under to eat. The first day I went there, I saw a Great Blue Heron standing on the shoreline, patiently fishing. The smells of pond water, rotting things, dirt, flowers, pollens, and the sounds of birds (even though they are sometimes muffled by the nearby traffic) really do make it feel something like a sanctuary—a place of refuge. I return here as often as possible by myself and eventually with others when we can be together outside.

I return another day with my daughter for a walk, and we’re bemused to find that the PNE mini-donut vendors are selling to hundreds of people lined up in their cars. The smell overwhelms the green growing plants and ocean breezes. We walk around the sanctuary and then a bit further to circle the Livestock Building right beside it, where we find the Japanese internment plaque attached to an entrance wall. It says:

Over 3,000 Japanese Canadian women, children and tuberculosis patients were unjustly detained here under traumatic and deplorable conditions between March 1942–March 1943. A public facility since 1929, the Livestock Building gained national historic significance as a federally authorized wartime marshalling site. The incarceration, confiscation of property, and forced dispersal from the coast of 22,000 innocent Japanese Canadians from 1942 to 1949 was officially acknowledged as unjust by Canada in 1988.

In commemoration of all Japanese Canadians interned.
Gaman (Endurance) Giri (Duty) Ganbare (Perseverance)

On another day, I walk around the sanctuary and then go further with a friend downhill toward the inlet and find a place where the shoreline is being restored to saltmarsh, and the local nations have shared *hən̓čəmin̓əm̓* words and knowledge regarding plants, tides, and birds. I’ll end my audio clip with the words they’ve put on the signs next to the ocean:

qeθəlp
lileʔəlp

sθəʔθqəy'
x^wele:lp
səlɔic'
st^θaq^wəy'
k^waləx^w
sməq^wa
maʔeq^w

I hope you are well—wherever you are.
Submitted with love and respect.