

## Performance Matters

# Introduction: Arriving in Place

Jenn Cole and Melissa Poll

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Performing (in) Place: Space, Relation, Action

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## Introduction: Arriving in Place

Jenn Cole and Melissa Poll

**A note to readers:** The following introduction to this issue of *Performance Matters* includes hyperlinks to multimedia editorial offerings.



Jenn arriving in place.

[As Jenn harvests spruce roots in Kiji Sibi watershed territory](#), with dirty hands, her voice overlays the images:

I think that on the inside I look like bits of birch bark, soil, mineral rock, moss, kiji sibi. That moist blue horizon. . . . I learn a lot about who I am from the Land, and it's here, where I am living now, in Michi Saagig territory, where I learn so much about how to bring gifts to my relatives, how to engage with my relations. Anne Taylor, from Curve Lake First Nation, teaches me that to say *aaniin* is to say the spirit light in me sees the spirit light in you. She also teaches me how to meet a canoe—a *jiimaan*—and I start to build a friendship with that one. Picking up teachings here and bringing them to my home territory is a gift, and being connected to the culture of my ancestors, to the Lands of them, that is one of the most beautiful parts of my universe. And being able to belong to that as research is a privilege and is one of the responsibilities that I pick up and intend to carry out with intention and care for the generations to come. Miigwech.

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**Jenn Cole** is mixed ancestry Algonquin Anishinaabe kwe from Kiji Sibi watershed territory. She is assistant professor in Indigenous performance and gender at Trent University, artistic director for Nozhem First Peoples Performance Space, and editor for *Canadian Theatre Review Views and Reviews*. **Melissa Poll** is settler scholar, dramaturge and instructor at Kansas State University in Social Transformation and English. Her research on intercultural theatre has been published in *Body, Space & Technology*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, *Theatre Research in Canada*, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, and *Performance Matters*. She is the author of *Robert Lepage's Scenographic Dramaturgy: The Aesthetic Signature at Work* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).



Jenn sits on stones on the shore of Kiji Sibi, legs extended. Next to her, some offerings lie on the ground. In one top corner, Puddles, the wheaton terrier, walks into frame. In the other, river waves rush into the shoreline, which is lined with reeds.

It is good to be home.





Melissa arriving in place.

[I \[Melissa\] work at the first land-grant institution established under the 1862 Morrill Act, Kansas State University.](#) I acknowledge that the state of Kansas is historically home to many Indigenous nations, including the [Kaw](#), [Osage](#), and [Pawnee](#), among others. Furthermore, Kansas is the current home to four federally recognized Indigenous nations: The [Prairie Band Potawatomie](#), the [Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas](#), the [Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska](#), and [Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska](#).

Many Indigenous nations utilized the western plains of Kansas as their hunting grounds, and others—such as the Delaware—were moved through this region during Indian removal efforts to make way for White settlers. It's important to acknowledge this, since the land that serves as the foundation for the institution where I work was, and still is, stolen land.

I remember these truths because K-State's status as a land-grant institution is a story that exists within ongoing settler colonialism and rests on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and nations from their Lands. These truths are often invisible to many. The recognition that K-State's history begins and continues through Indigenous contexts is essential.

### **Why We Care About This Work: Editors in Conversation**

Below [and online](#), we, Jenn and Melissa, discuss our investments in this work.



The editors in video conversation.

**Melissa:** Well, good to see you.

**Jenn:** Good to see you too.

**M:** We're back again, four years later.

**J:** Yeah, here we are, at it again. Has it been four years?

**M:** Yeah, I think that (last) issue came out in pandemic time, or shortly after.

**J:** Yeah, yeah. It feels good to be doing the work in this way with you.

**M:** It always feels good to do it with you like this. It's such a treat and such a gift.

**J:** It really is. I was trying to think about Melissa, you know why I care about this work, you know? Why do I care about responsible relationships to truthful histories and embodied work that engages with place and place specificity and cultural specificity? Why do I care about performance practices that are connected to Indigenous Lands and protocols across Lands in their diversities and complexities? And it's kind of hard for me to renew that question because I think it's just most of what I care about, you know! Like, why do I care? Because it feels really important, and it's what I spend a lot of time doing.

I have to say it was really so good walking to the beach here in my home territory yesterday. I'm in home territory, I'm visiting my Mom. And we're quite downriver from where I grew up, so different horizon lines, different beach feeling on the feet, and even different waters, like, the water is really deep where I grew up and then it's a bit shallower out here, for further. I was trying in that kind of,

like, editorial responsive practice; go walking on the Land, think it all through, think about our contributors (maybe I shouldn't be using that in the possessive, but the ones who've contributed to this issue of *Performance Matters*), and I wanted to sort of, like, give a gift, with my movement and with my senses and with my Being in place.

But everything I did was just a gift to me. Not only a gift to me, but just ended up nourishing me; taking care of my own self, allowing me to sink into my own protocols that I've learned from my teachers in this territory and in Michi Saagiig territory. You know, making a fire, that's a gift for me. Standing in the water, that's a gift for me. Making offerings, that, like, fixes everything. So just to circle back to the question, you know, that I was asking myself, "Why is this work important to me?" I think it takes care of me.

**M:** Absolutely

**J:** Yeah.

**M:** Well, we were talking about mothering, right?

It's hugely beneficial, it's a reciprocity of care, right? You're giving care to the Land and the Land's giving care back to you. Like, I had a really long teaching day and it's just so nice to be out here on the lawn, with the sun, to have my bare feet in the grass, you know, and just to be on the Land and figuring out what it means to be accountable for the history of this Land. And what does that mean going forward for me and for you?

Especially being on this Land, colonially known as the United States, and at a land-grant university, which is very interesting because the university has profited from Indigenous Lands. So just figuring that out and, yeah, being in relation to the Land. And also, like you, I've been out walking, and I just think about our contributors and the care and concern that they have brought to the work. It really feels to me like a conversation that we couldn't have had a decade ago, with settlers and Indigenous collaborators.

So yeah, it just really refreshes me, and the way it's benefiting both sides. I mean, I'm not going to congratulate myself anymore, or us, but there's something about this that feels like a good way of working. And it's brought people to us who want to continue to work in a good way. And with the editorial practice, we're learning from them as they're learning from us. And you are always my greatest teacher, and I'm, you know, learning from you throughout this.

**J:** And you are a beautiful collaborator, and also a heavy lifter. Miigwech for taking on so much labour. And I know you know publication is labour-intensive. And then the authors, their work doesn't just arise out of sitting down and thinking something and writing it out and doing that work. But out of often long-back relationships, long-back working, around even embodied practice training, but also working with Indigenous nations or within people's own communities. There's so much.

I was listening to Gina Star Blanket's keynote at a conference this weekend, and she used words that I cite actually in a kind of poem or thinking piece that I did at the beach yesterday, but she described "ongoing plunder." She's really brilliant about articulating the stakes of doing, in her case,

Indigenous feminist work. She's the editor of *Making Space for Indigenous Feminisms*, the third edition, and I guess I'm just thinking; we're place people, and embodied work people, and performance people, and Indigenous / settler collaboration and relationship people, and thinking about responsible pedagogy and responsible scholarship people, and we're doing that work.

But so many others are doing the work. And the stakes are actually really high, so I know you're saying you don't want to overcelebrate the work that we've done here, and it is like something sort of small within the grand scheme of, "How do we go forward at a nation-to-nation level? At a systemic level? At an individual, the level of my skin? Like, how do I go ahead if we haven't actually figured out where the heck we are? And what that means to each of us differently?" I think it is a really important question right now, and I do appreciate the work of all the many, many people who are doing it alongside us for sure.

**M:** Well, it is interesting for me today being my first day back to teaching and doing it here [in Kansas], I did a Land Acknowledgement for my students and they're not used to it down here. And it was really interesting to sort of have the discussion about what it meant and I do see that they are not thinking of it as—there are some people who feel that they're being blamed for something—but the students are really seeing it as an opportunity for a different way of thinking and being accountable going forward, which is so refreshing. You know no one was bristling, which can happen down here.

I feel hopeful, but again I think it begins with the Land. Whose Land are you on and how are you living in relationship to those nations? It's everything.

**J:** Yeah. It also takes a really long time to get to know a place, is one other thing I'd like to share. I'm just thinking about, you know, being a little bit downriver, by which I mean like a fifteen-minute drive, you know, and probably like a twenty-five-minute paddle if you're really good (I'm not!) downriver. So even here, there are all these relatives I recognize, but even here, I feel like I'm still homesick a little bit. So interesting.

And then you know, I'm living in Michi Saagiig territory, which isn't so far from here, it's maybe three and a half hours or so to my home. I've been thinking about this a lot recently. I moved to Nogojiwanong (also known as Peterborough) in 2002. I've met a bunch of people, certainly not everyone. I've spent time outside, I've put my feet in the water, you know, made artwork in that place that is always trying to, kind of, give back and bring teachings from the Michi Saagig teachers I get to work with in that place; bring them out to those who wish. And all the same it's so, so not like here.

And partly because of special things. Like something really special in that territory is the water goes underground and then makes all these beautiful sounds in all kinds of places, like at the Teaching Rocks, and then, also at Squaknegissippi/Warsaw caves, that has old kettles and limestone rocks where the water goes under. Anyway, it's a totally different space of knowing and it feels obvious to me when I'm there how back and back and back and back they're other people's ancestors who had cool technological practices and community gatherings and songs and teachings and conversations and relationships and actions and gestures on the Land. So, coming to know, coming to know where we are and coming to know a place, I think it takes way deeper time than I have in this lifetime, even though it's one of my favourite things.

**M:** Well, do you feel... I feel like we have come to know our process and practice together and I feel like that's something that is going to continue to grow. And it's not something I would ever articulate, as like, these are the steps you take. But I do feel like we've created a space, and it's mostly been virtual. When did we see each other last? In 2019. But we have a way of communicating and working that is kind of the Jenn and Melissa culture.

**J:** Yeah, I think it's like, from my own experiences, it's like Anishinaabe culture. It's intergenerational hangout culture; you know, talking a lot about parenting and a lot about the heart and then a lot about workspaces too and how we want to navigate those in a good way.

Yeah, I think... I don't know, here's a teaching... [laughing]

We're just not supposed to hang out with beings when we're asking for help, even though you know, I know a good tree, I really like her. Oh, she sways in such a good way, when I lean on her she's still swaying and creaking. And you know, of course, I'm, like, drowning in caregiving responsibilities, with a little support or whatever, but still, I don't just want to go to her broken hearted, when I need to have that kind of talk. I also want to go when I've got a good apple and I want to sit on the ground and we just chat, we just hang out, we just spend time together. And I think maybe it's not a broad sweeping statement about process but just about my process with you; the conversation and the mutual care is part of, and inseparable from, the curatorial piece or the editorial piece

**M:** And I feel, like, our, again, yeah, I don't want to make it possessive, but the people who have contributed to this issue, they bring this same kind of care and generosity. And I think that's really evident in their pieces but also just in our interactions with them; every email was just an opportunity to smile, from these folks, you know? It brought a lot of light and joy, you know, in a time where you and I are doing the balancing act right? Being a Mom, being an educator, you know, being responsible to community, it's a lot. And to kind of know that there are these other people out in many places doing the work and, yeah, just doing it in a way that really inspires me.

**J:** I agree, and doing it, really, I agree, like, from a position of care, and considered, carefulness, as well, and also a kind of curiosity, there's a lot of work happening on its feet, and going well and taking left turns and, you know, going around that rock. And I think it's really creative work that's been shared as well, and it made me feel good to read every piece we received.

**M:** I kind of don't want to let them go, I want to hold them [laughter].

**J:** [Laughter] We'll share them! We're sharing it all with the world! And then we can all hold them. More people can come over for tea.

**M:** That's right, this is our cup of tea sharing conversation, this issue. Erin Hurley was at UBC when I was there, and she used to say "When you are writing a paper, you think of it like you're sitting at the table, and who have you invited to the dinner party? And who are you talking with?" And I mean, with these guys, I don't even think we're at a dinner party, I think we're outside walking on the Land... but they're the ones who I want to have the conversations with. And what they give is, it's just light and goodness.



**J:** Walking on the Land. And then someone busts the dance move...

**M:** [Laughing]

**J:** [Laughing]

## Themes

Here, Melissa has picked up themes from each author's piece with a mind to commonalities across the authors' offerings in the context of place-based performance and pedagogy focused on Indigenous-settler relationships.

**Julie Burrelle and Beth Piatote:** wise performance-making practices in Indigenous-settler collaborations; reciprocity; working beyond Land Acknowledgement; working beyond settler colonialism; activating settler accountability; reciprocity in performance process and practice

**Yi-Jen Yu:** cultural and sensorial consumption and communication; language revitalization/mother tongues; Indigenous modalities in the mainstream; challenging settler-capitalist power structures

**Sammy Roth, Miya Shaffer, and Tria Blu Wakpa:** possibilities of community-engaged decolonial pedagogies; impacting settler-capitalist frameworks and legacies of extractivism/appropriation; supporting cultural revitalization initiatives; Indigenous issues at land-grant institutions; what it means to be good relatives

**Alana Gerecke and Karen Jamieson:** connecting performance practice to the land; building relationships with Indigenous collaborators based on reciprocity, relationality, and accountability; collaborating with Indigenous artists in nonextractive ways

**Leah Decter and Peter Morin:** the varied intimacies of live and virtual spaces of visiting; activating noncolonial concepts of host-guest relations that enact Indigenous sovereignties; confronting the certainty of settler emplacement while considering the responsibilities of settler guesting; extractivism (James Teit's stories/Group of Seven arts); disturbing patterns of white settler entitlement and settler-state sovereignty; appropriations of Indigenous culture in the early twentieth century; ethical approaches to Indigenous-settler collaborations

**Benjamin Ross Nicholson:** dispossession and its repercussions, including lack of agency; ideas of property and what can be possessed; the significance possession confers in settler colonial society; emancipation and processes of de-possession; engaging with anticolonialism in material, experiential, and intuitive ways; building and amplifying a culture of care

## Responses I

Editors Jenn and Melissa offer responses to the pieces in this issue of *Performance Matters* below.

**Jenn:** I hold all of these written and performed works in my body mind as I walk through my days, and an embodied responsive practice grows. Ideas shimmer at the edges as they form, and I trust that when I move my body on the Land, a concrete reciprocation will emerge. I know I wish to walk

down to the river in Algonquin territory with some of the authors in mind, some of the textual and imagistic resonances and be with the stones.

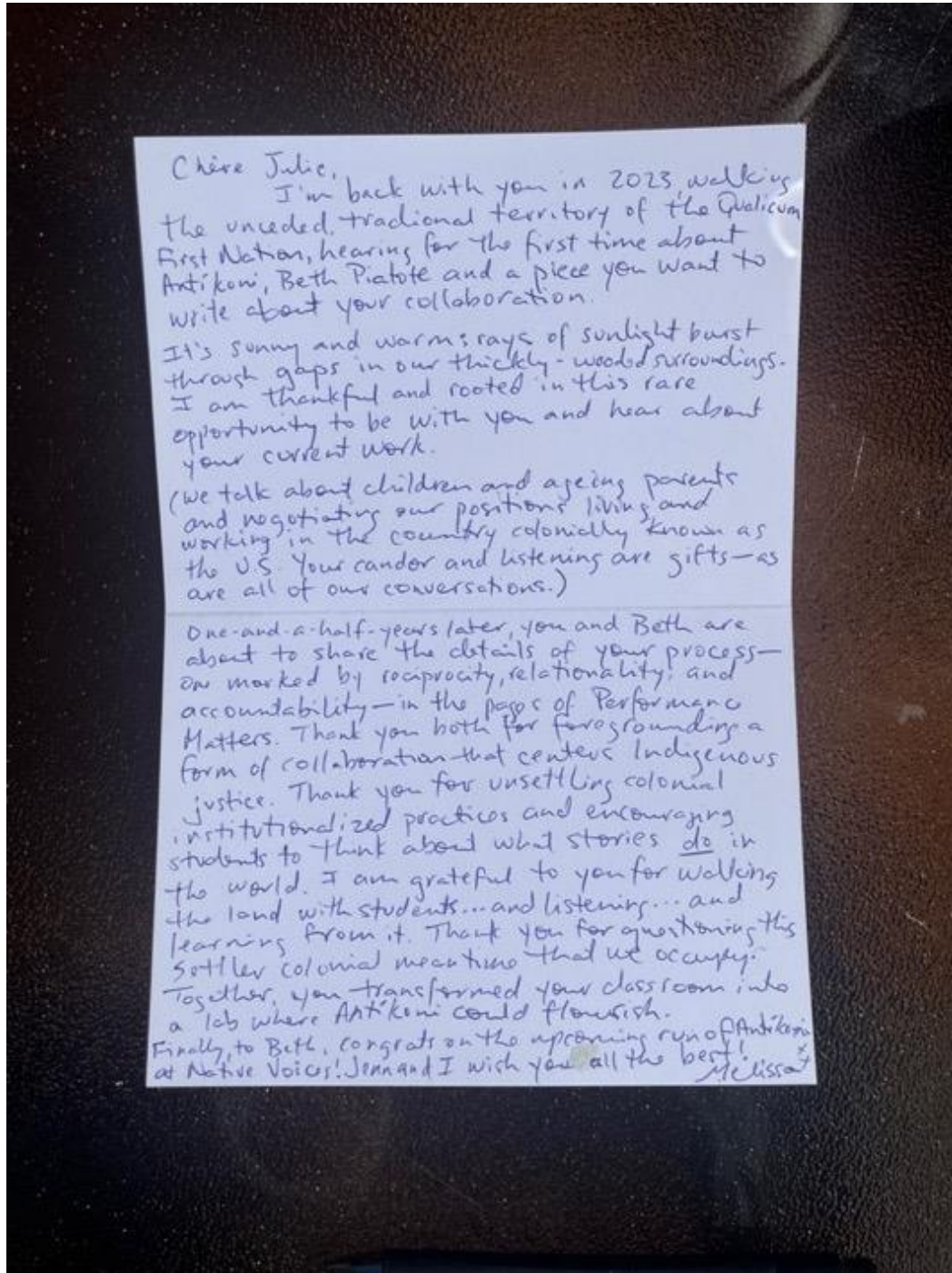
Receiving a story—that is, being entrusted with it.  
—Julie Burelle

I went to the shore to think it all through and somehow it became all about sea monsters.



A drawing of a sea monster who lives in the Kiji Sibi waterways by Jenn. Pink and green seaweed and dark blue sea monster hair intertwine in many wavy lines. Whiskers. Alcohol marker on paper and washi tape at the edges where Jenn's child taped this to the wall.

Melissa:



A letter to Julie Burelle from Melissa Poll, August 2024.

The letter reads:

Dear Julie,

I'm back in 2023 with you, walking the unceded traditional territory of the Qualicum First Nation, hearing for the first time about *Antikoni*, Beth Piatote and a piece you want to write about your collaboration.

It's sunny and warm; rays of sunlight burst through gaps in our thickly-wooded surroundings. I am thankful and rooted in this rare opportunity to be with you and hear about your current work.

(We talk about children and ageing parents and negotiating our positions living and working in the country colonially known as the United States. Your candor and listening are gifts—as are all our conversations.)

One-year-and-a-half later, you and Beth are about to share the details of your process—a process marked by reciprocity, relationality and accountability—in the pages of *Performance Matters*. Thanks to you both for modelling a form of collaboration that foregrounds Indigenous justice. Thank you for unsettling colonial institutionalized practices and encouraging students to think about what stories *do* in the world. I am grateful to you for walking the land with students... and listening... and learning from it. Thank you for questioning this settler colonial meantime we occupy. Together, you transformed your classroom into a lab within which *Antikoni* could flourish.

Finally, to Beth, congratulations on the upcoming run of *Antikoni* at Native Voices at the Austry! Jenn and I wish you the absolute best on this journey!

Warmly,

Melissa


For Julie, Beth, and our readers: A poster for *Stories from the Indian Boarding School*. This script has been incredibly generative in my classroom. For more information on exploring this resource with your students, please contact Elisa Blandford ([eblandford@theautry.org](mailto:eblandford@theautry.org)), managing director of Native Voices



**FREE THEATRE PERFORMANCES**


# STORIES FROM THE INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL

SEPT. 20, 8PM, PROSPECT THEATRE, MODESTO  
SEPT. 21, 8PM, STAN STATE MAINSTAGE THEATRE



**Based on first-person narratives, videos, and historical documents, this collection of stories depicts the reality and repercussions of the American Indian boarding school system from the late 1800s to the present whose motto was “Kill the Indian and save the man.”**


Photo left:  
Photo: Thomas Moore, as he appeared when admitted to the Regina Indian Industrial School, May 1874.  
Source: Library and Archives Canada/Annual report of the Department of Indian Affairs (1896)/AMICUS 90778/nlc-01524  
Photo: Thomas Moore, after tuition at the Regina Indian Industrial School.



Student body on the grounds of the Carlisle Indian School, 1884. 375 students. Photo by John N. Choate. Courtesy of Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA.

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## NATIVE VOICES AT THE ATRUM

Top Photos: Three Sioux boys, Wounded Yellow Robe, Henry Standing Bear, and Chauncey Yellow Robe, at Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1883 and 1886. Photo: John N. Choate. Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center. Bottom Photo: Student body on the grounds of the Carlisle Indian School, 1884. Photo by John N. Choate. Courtesy of Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA.

Jenn:

Let's try my granny's specialties.  
—Aljenljeng Tjaluvie, via Yi-Jen Yu

I am thinking of bellies. And our shoreline and river foods. Manoomin. Cattail. Wikenh. Swamp medicines. I eat chocolate by the shore and share with my relatives.

Sea monster  
Grandmother with sea whiskers  
I saw you next to the rocks  
Seal bait  
Meat eater  
Water Memory ancestor  
You like it when the river floods  
You rest all night while the rafters blast apart

Melissa:



[For Yi-Jen: Melissa's children \(and friend\) experiencing Abao for the first time on a late August evening. Song: "Thank You" by Abao \(2019\).](#)

Jenn:

I will consider the spaces I inhabit; if I gather, I will also give.  
—student, via Sammy Roth, Mia Shaffer, and Tria Blu Wakpa





A Kiji Sibi Beach Ceremony.

[Kiji Sibi/Ottawa River moves in waves made by strong winds on an August day](#). A big sky hangs over a green line of hills across the river. Jenn steps through blowing shore grasses to stand in the water. She rolls up her pants, her back to the camera, her heart to the horizon, and crouches down. She places semaa, some meat, and some chocolate in the water. She rises and puts the rest of the chocolate in her pocket. She walks deeper into the river, rises, stands awhile, turns and walks back towards the shore and off camera. Her voiceover:

Sometimes I have to walk it out on the shore.  
We can make our fires anywhere if we are in the right places  
I am feeding a sea monster  
Beach ceremony

Semaa, meat eater gifts and chocolate in case she likes something sweet  
I can never out-gift this river  
Nibi  
Noodin

Shkode  
Even the gift of fire is a gift given to myself

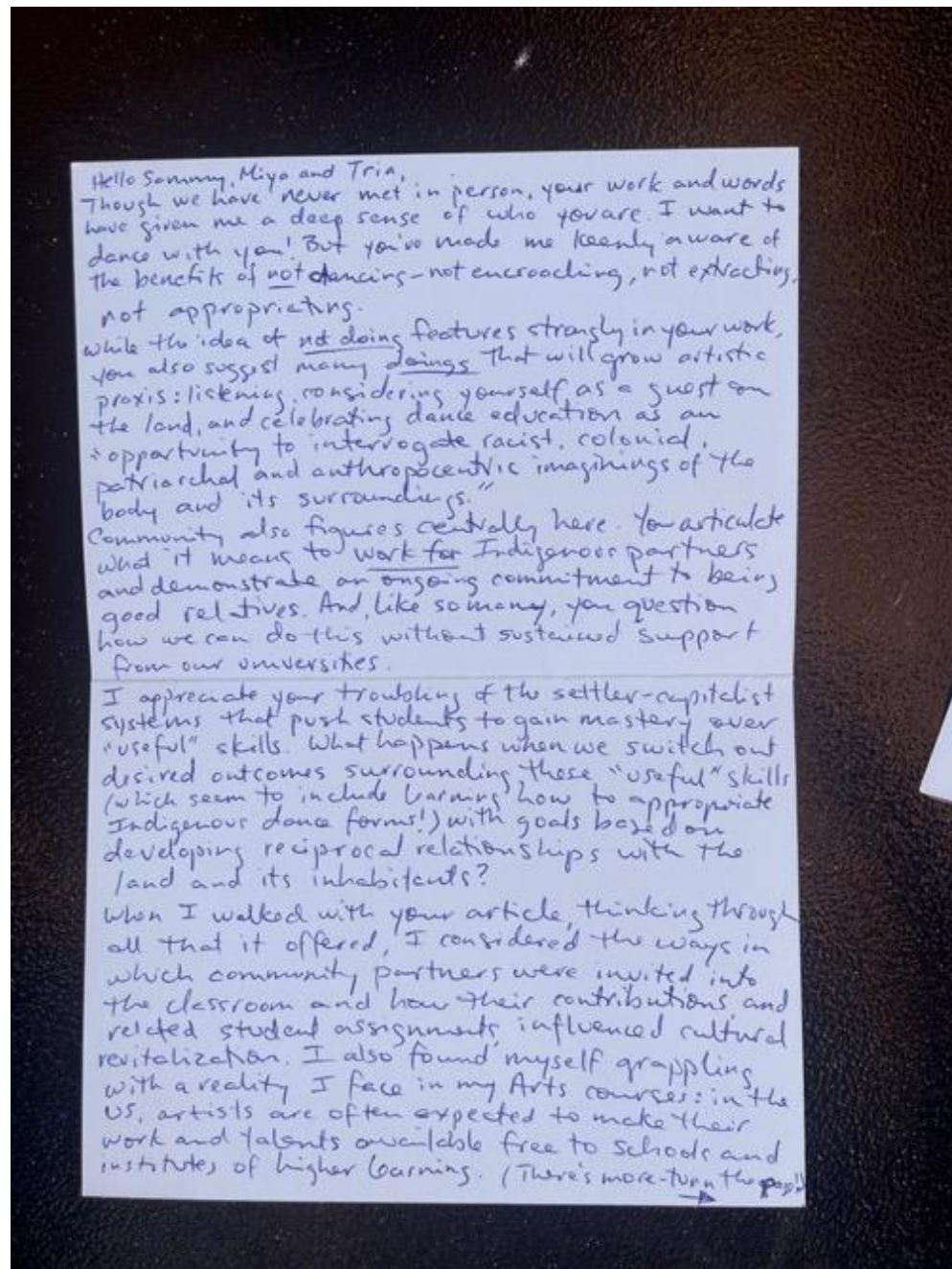
I need Ones powerful enough to hold my sadness and my rage  
In this ongoing plunder  
In this ongoing

Life giving  
 Weight bearing  
 Land asinig skin

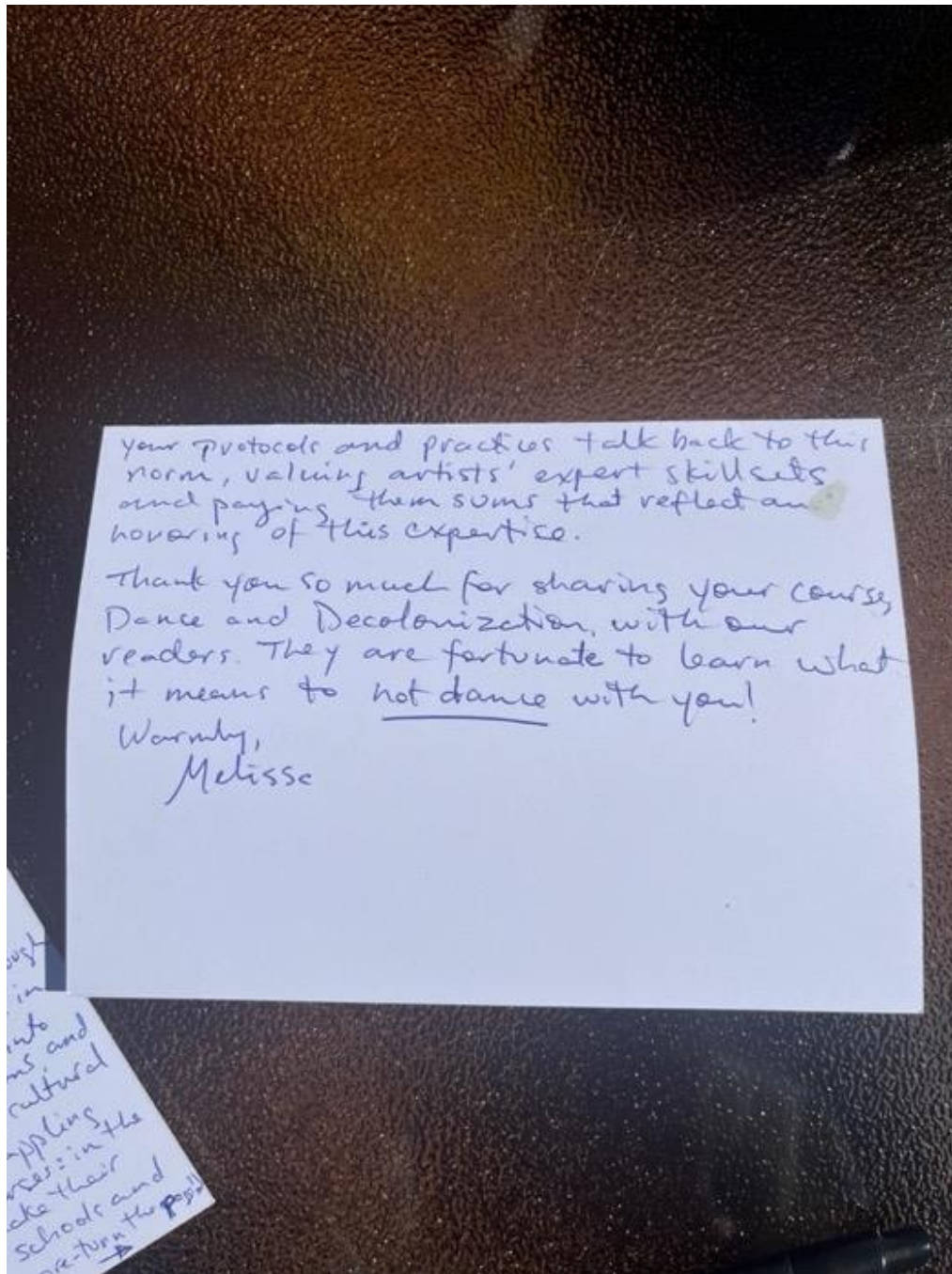
System  
 Of swaying reeds

I make an x out of matches  
 I am held up and together by my relatives

Melissa:







A letter to Sammy Roth, Miya Shaffer, and Tria Blu Wakpa from Melissa Poll, August 2024.

The letter reads:

Hello Sammy, Miya and Tria,

Though we have never met in person, your work and words have given me a deep sense of who you are. I want to dance with you! But you've also made me keenly aware of the benefits of *not dancing*—not encroaching, not extracting, not appropriating.

While the idea of *not doing* features strongly in your work, you also suggest many *doings* that will grow artistic praxis: listening, considering yourself as a guest on the land, and celebrating dance education as an “opportunity to interrogate racist, colonial, patriarchal, and anthropocentric imaginings of the body and its surroundings.”

Community also figures centrally here. You articulate what it means to *work for* Indigenous partners and demonstrate an ongoing commitment to being good relatives. And, like so many, you question how we can do this without sustained support from our universities.

I appreciate your troubling of the settler-capitalist systems that push students to gain mastery over “useful” skills. What happens when we switch out desired outcomes surrounding these “useful” skills (such as learning how to appropriate Indigenous dance forms!) with goals based on developing reciprocal relationships with the land and its inhabitants?

When I walked with your article, thinking through all that it offered, I considered the ways in which community partners were invited into the classroom and how their contributions, and related student assignments, influenced cultural revitalization. I also found myself grappling with a reality I face in my Arts courses: in the US, artists are often expected to make their work and talents available free to schools and institutes of higher learning. Your protocols and practices talk back to this norm, valuing artists’ expert skill sets and paying them sums that reflect an honoring of their expertise.

Thank you for sharing your course, *Dance and Decolonization*, with our readers. They are fortunate to have the opportunity to not dance with you!

Warmly,

Melissa

## Keywords

Here, Jenn has moved through each piece’s abstract and retrieved key and resonant words and phrases that anchor the authors’ offerings in specificity around performance work in ethical and generative connection with place, especially in the context of Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous settler collaborations.

*Antikoni*

repatriation

reciprocate

transformative work

student

Aljenljeng Tjaluvie

pop

Paiwan

lyrical

transcultural conversations

stomach

performance classroom

not-dancing

listening

community

constraints of learning

good relatives

Land speed

site

dance practice

atonement

respectful

paths crossing

Tahltn Nation

stories

X

Indigenous sovereignties

settler responsibilities

tributaries

dispossession

Indigenous performance scholarship

de-occupying

material decoloniality

circulation of care

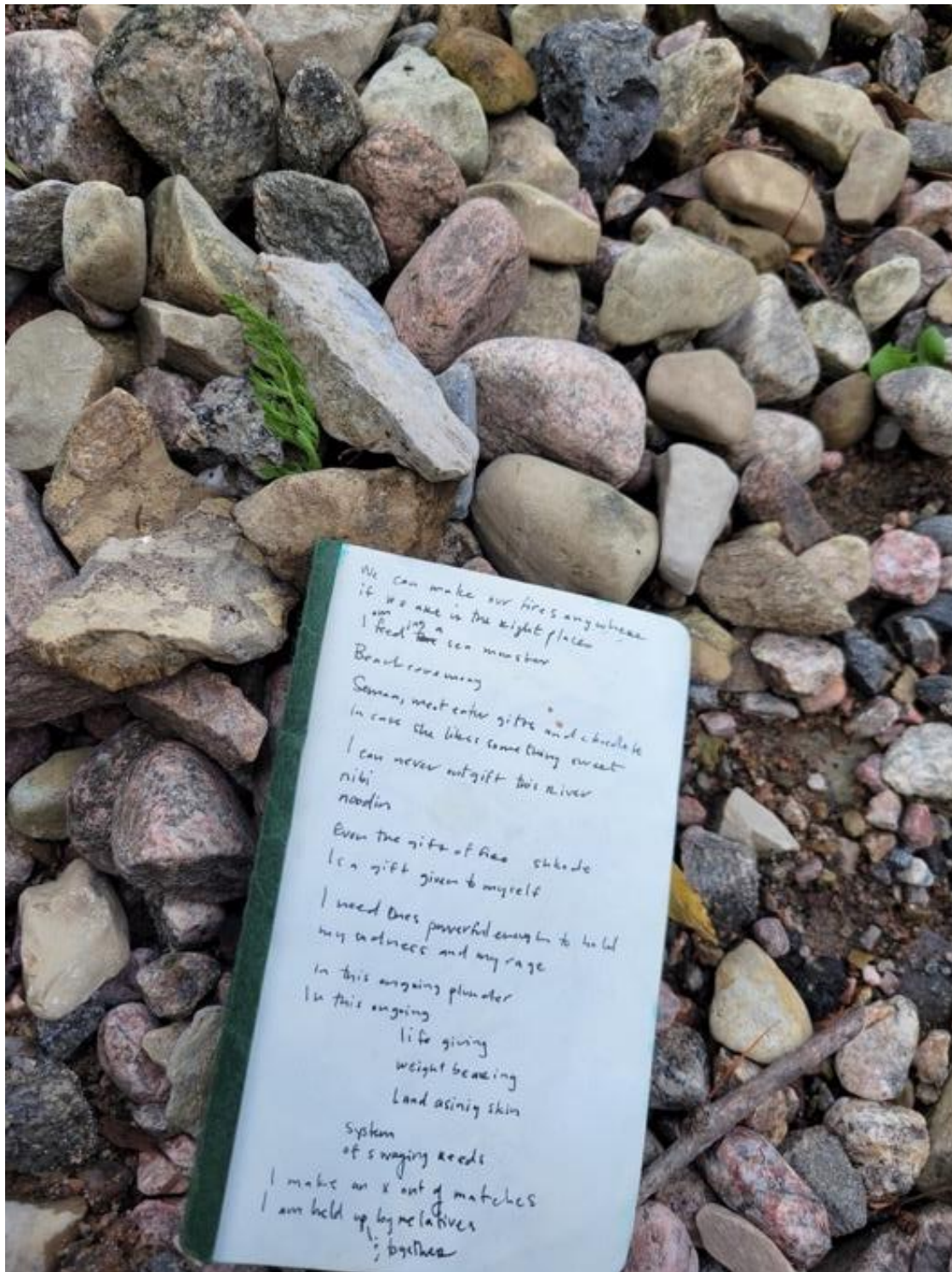
## Responses II

Jenn:

The speed of the Land. . . .

Just saying something isn't enough. You've got to *do* it. The ceremony, the physical enactment or embodiment is the transformative piece.

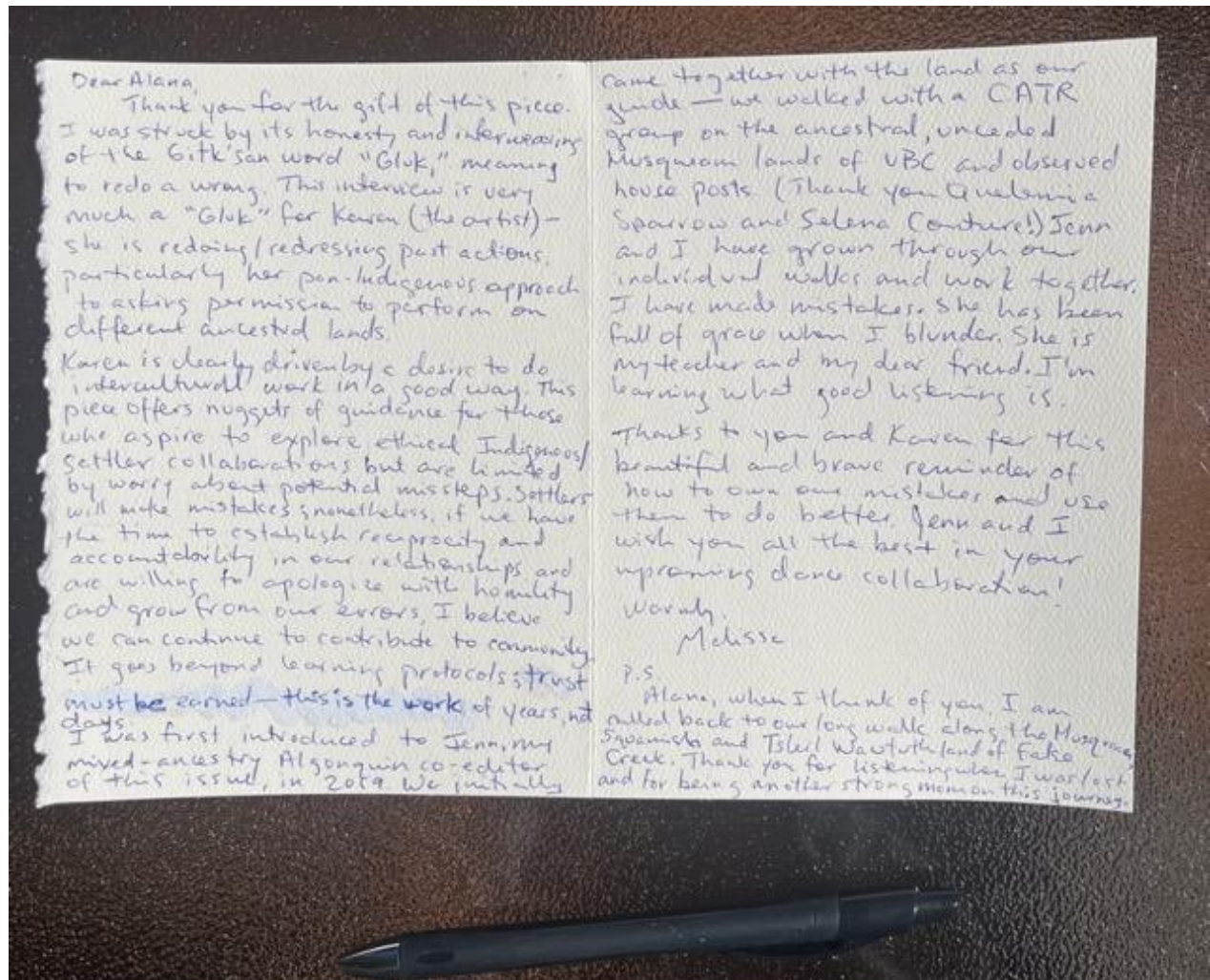
—Alana Gerecke and Karen Jamison



Photograph of river stones, yarrow plucked on Jenn's walk to the water, and a notebook inscription of some words that arose as part of the beach ceremony for the authors and relationships articulated in the issue.



Melissa:



A letter to Alana Gerecke from Melissa Poll, August 2024.

The letter reads:

Dear Alana,

Thank you for this piece. I was struck by its honesty and interweaving of the Gitk'san word "Gluk," meaning to redo a wrong. This interview is very much a "Gluk" for Karen (the artist)—she is redoing/redressing past actions, particularly her pan-Indigenous approach to asking permission to perform on different ancestral lands.

Karen is clearly driven by a desire to do intercultural work in a good way. This piece offers nuggets of guidance for those who aspire to explore ethical Indigenous/settler collaborations but are limited by worry about potential missteps. Settlers will make mistakes; nonetheless, if we have taken the time to establish reciprocity and accountability in our relationships and are willing to apologize with humility and

grow from our errors, I believe we can continue to contribute to community. It goes beyond learning protocols; trust must be earned—this is the work of years, not days.

I was first introduced to Jenn Cole, the mixed-ancestry Algonquin co-editor of this issue, in 2019. We initially came together with the land as our guide—we walked with a CATR group on the ancestral, unceded Musqueam lands of UBC and observed house posts. We have grown through our individual walks and work together. I have made mistakes. She has been full of grace when I blunder. She is my teacher and my dear friend. I'm learning what good listening is.

Thanks to you and Karen for this beautiful and brave reminder about how to own our mistakes and use them to do better. I wish you all the best in your upcoming dance collaboration!

Warmly,

Melissa

**Jenn:**

We draw here on Tania Willard's characterization of site/ation as a practice of citation in which the land is referenced and acknowledged as a critical contributor to developing knowledge.

—Leah Decter and Peter Morin

I make my own x.

Watershed to watershed.

In the morning, the next day, Peter sings his mother's song online and I receive their sounds as shared medicine, as love.



Photograph of an x Jenn made with matches from her smudge on a stone on the shore. Pinks and greys of granite meet vivid greens of river algae-stained rocks. The shadowed spaces between the stones make their own variations on x.



Melissa:



A text message sent to Jenn Cole from Melissa Poll, August 2024.



Jenn:

Those performances that would reverse flows of dispossession.  
—Benjamin Ross Nicholson

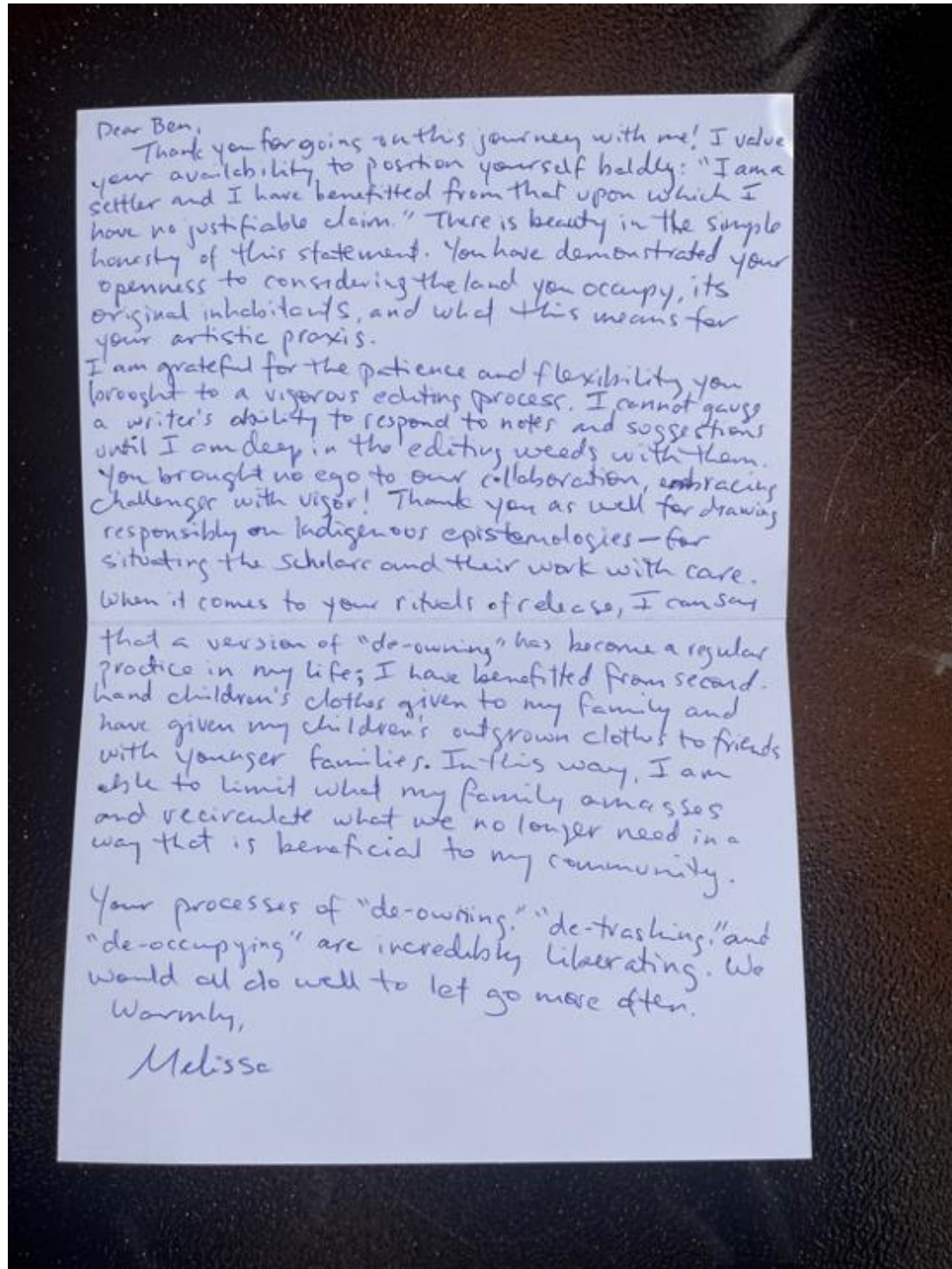


Photograph of the remains of a small fire Jenn had on the beach. Spent matches, burnt bits of sage and white pine needles are encircled by a makeshift wreath of stones, each one placed from the plentitude of shoreline gifts. Plant life and cold, wet mineral sand peek through.

The beach ceremony follows the fullness of protocols I have learned from my Anishinaabe teachers, practices that have survived systemic and sensate dispossession. As I release offerings to feed a Being I know only a little, one who makes herself scarce, I engage in my own “circulation of care” interconnected across temporalities and geographic distances with so many relatives. This embodied

response to the ones who have shared to make this issue of *Performance Matters* possible also follows artistic intuition and gift giving performance impulses. I try to leave the river's edge as I found it, but having inscribed this practice of corporeal, material, and inspirited interdependence in this place.

Melissa:



A letter to Benjamin Ross Nicholson from Melissa Poll, August 2024.

The letter reads:

Dear Ben,

Thank you for going on this journey with me! I value your availability to position yourself baldly: “I am a settler and I have benefitted from that upon which I have no justifiable claim.” There is beauty in the simple honesty of this statement. You have demonstrated your openness to considering the land you occupy, its original inhabitants, and what this means for your artistic praxis.

I am grateful for the patience and flexibility you brought to a rigorous editing process. I find I cannot gauge a writer’s ability to respond to notes and suggestions until I’m deep in the weeds of edits with them. You brought no ego to our collaboration, embracing challenges with vigor! Thank you as well for drawing responsibly on Indigenous epistemologies—for situating the work and the scholars with care.

When it comes to your rituals of release, I can say that a version of “de-owning” has become a regular practice in my life; I have benefitted from second-hand children’s clothing given to my family and have given my children’s outgrown clothes to friends with younger children. In this way, I am able to limit what my family amasses and recirculate what we no longer need in a way that is beneficial to others.

Your processes of “de-owning,” “de-trashing,” and “de-occupying” are incredibly liberating. We would all do well to let go more often.

Warmly,

Melissa

## **Thanks**

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