

The Henceforward Episode 10

Writing into the Henceforward

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Eve: Aang aang. This is Eve Tuck, and this is The Henceforward, a podcast on settler colonialism and anti-blackness on Turtle Island. Here, we seek to build mutually respectful conversations about Indigenous and Black life in settler societies through attempting to talk, text, transit, and land.

Stephanie: On September 30, 2016, the Ontario Institute for Studies and Education at the University of Toronto hosted the Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education Conference, a one day conference for writers and aspiring writers.

As described on the conference website, the day held space for celebration, contemplation, reflection, and collective learning about resisting and intervening with settler colonial frameworks in our practices, places, and modalities of writing within the academy.

Deanna: In this episode of The Henceforward, we have collective snippets from the discussions that took place at the conference. This episode is split into three segments based on the themes that emerged from the few of the conversations. Throughout the event, we checked in with conference attendees to find out what it means to them to write into The Henceforward. We share these conversations to inspire our listeners to continue them further.

What does it mean to write into The Henceforward?

Speaker 1: Recently, I've been thinking a lot about relationships and about how me, being here, is going to impact my family and my community and what I can give.

Speaker 2: I sat on doing what I've already been spending my lifetime working towards. I had a good university to learn about my family and about my identity and my culture and my language as a Mohawk/Kanyenkeha/Haudenosaunee woman. In doing so, I don't want my daughter to ever have to do that. My writing is always going to include myself as expert. I want her to grow up knowing who she is, and to have an environment that's healthy. The only way to do that is for all of us to work together, to write together, to collaborate on our experiences, because we all share these lands.

Stephanie: During the writing conference, we heard from scholars, activists, and community members about their relationship to place. This section features Eve Tuck, Rinaldo Walcott, and Karyn Recollet, discussing relationality, Blackness, Indigeneity and the collapse of time and space.

In Eve Tuck's opening keynote, she spoke to contingent collaborations.

Eve: As much as the paper that Wayne and I wrote that's called Decolonization is Not a Metaphor, as much intention as that paper has received over the years, the idea that I like the most about that paper is around contingent collaborations, my collaborations in the Black/Land Project, and I described our contingent collaboration is not asking for anything more than it could give. It was tentative, it was vulnerable, it was willing yet with closed boundaries in many significant areas.

Today, as a whole, we will think together about what it means to live, to do work, to write, and make meaning, and make relationship on Indigenous land. We will think about what it means to live in a society that requires the theft of Indigenous land and the disavowal of that theft.

Stephanie: Next, we'll hear pieces of a conversation between Eve Tuck and Rinaldo Walcott on settler colonialism and snit-blackness.

Rinaldo: Because the question of land is again not only a thorny issue but is one in which certain kinds of bodies and histories, certain kinds of persons, are immediately informed of alienation to the land or what we mark as land. These create some significant tensions around how we might think of forums of contemporary debates within Indigenous studies and around the notion of Indigeneity. But also coming out of a region in the Caribbean where the question of alienation is central to how one begins to think about what one might be, and therefore, how one might be gained to think about all the processes of Indigeneity, like how does one become Indigenous to the place that you are not from, how does one become Indigenous to a place that you're alienated from, how does one become.

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This question of becoming is for me, central, to the kind of dialogue that we were trying to forge.

Eve: Why is the goal to try to become Indigenous to a place, and not to become belonged to a place? This process of becoming, to me, it seems like it is a settler obsession to be obsessed with trying to become Indigenous to a place, but I'm not sure why that is a way that it necessarily needs to be understood. I think of Kim -- I had an interview with Kim TallBear recently, where she was talking about kinship and the significance, the growing significance of kinship in her work, and what she talked about was you know, we need to be in relationship, and that relationship needs to exist outside of the ways that we have available to us.

I'm talking about Black and Indigenous people needing to be in relationship with each other, Black and Indigenous people in Turtle Island, needing to be in relationship to each other outside of how those relationships have already been constructive within settler states, already been constructed within settler colonial configurations of race.

She said that that I am not interested in a relationship in which people are trying to become Indigenous, because I do not consent to that. Our relationship needs to be mutual, it needs to be mutually consensual. I do not consent to that being somebody's endgame.

I wonder about what productive differences there could be between projects of belonging, becoming belonged, if we want to stay with becoming, or projects of becoming Indigenous which I'm far less interested in consenting to.

Rinaldo: How do we make sense of this group of people for whom homeland is a mirage, but who, because of the current arrangements of how the human life is organized, must also claim a place of belonging. Some of the ways in which we deploy notions of indigeneity actually say to those people that you have nowhere in the world.

Eve: I want to think about how Indigenous desires to recognize the ways in which place, which land and water are significant is an exception and is exceptional from the kind of demands on Black people to account in every kind of public encounter about where they're from because they can't possibly be from here.

We have to be able to set aside the way that that is working in larger mainstream settler society, and be able to fathom the questions of centering land in place in Indigenous frameworks has a different set of terms of conditions. Why do are relations have to be inherit something that actually works in very good ways in order to tell Black people that they won't ever belong, and tell Indigenous people that they don't belong anymore because you're dead.

How do we not inherit something that never came from our relations? How does saying we're all Indigenous from some place, or some of us are Indigenous, align the ways in which some of us are Indigenous to this place, and that that sets into motion, a set of obligations about how we relate and how we make sense in this place.

Stephanie: Finally, here's Karyn Recollet on radical relationality portal spaces and critical land pedagogy.

Karyn: What are those languages really fascinates me, like what are the languages, what are the gestures, what are the vocabularies that we use in terms of thinking about radically relating to each other without needing to conflate differences for something that we need to search for something that's similar.

Also, thinking through well, the collapse of time and space. Our radical relationship building practices, I believe need to consider, and need to develop within this space of the spatial time collapse.

People have written, Grace Dillon, for example, writes about the slipstream. People have written about these portal spaces where time and space kind of collapses upon itself. This is where I feel like maybe it's just my own experiences, but the necessity of love to rupture itself, the necessity of love to be sort of an impermanent force that ruptures and repeatedly ruptures over and over and over again, to kind of remind us that temporal and special are always in moments of recalibrating and becoming apart and recalibrating and coming apart.

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When I think about celestial stuff, it's like these are glitches in the system. These aren't -- not spoiling Billy-Ray Belcourt's vocabulary, is that these moments of breathtaking are glitches, so they are sort of impermanent to -- so in cruising your way to utopia, it's like when you get there, it's that moment of breathtaking up when you reach that celestial point, but then you're also very much rooted in a spatial here now.

I guess what I'm thinking through is thinking about space and place and time and how do we do territorial acknowledgments and relationship building taking into consideration that land space has overflowed themselves into celestial. Can I say that I'm firmly planted in this space, in this territory, in this land that is also continuously changing and evolving and flowing? I mean you pick manoomin wild rice, and that seed travels.

As soon as you actually -- what's that word when you harvest wild rice? I'm not a wild rice harvester. I just heard about it. Melody McKiver was telling us that when Melody shucks the core, shucks the seed, I'm not sure what that word is. Separate the seed from the stock that those seeds travel.

For me, that's like thinking about land migrates too. Land changes, think about the glaciers, the flood. Land changes. Land migrates. Land travels. Land flies into the air and jumps scale.

What does that mean if we were to think about critical land pedagogies in this way? And for us folks in thinking through Indigenous studies, how do we think about -- what does that do? What does that thinking -- where can that thinking take us in terms of radical relationship building or thinking through creative solidarities, to use Ruben's concept, what does this mean to be related celestially? What are all of our old stories about those celestial relationships? Just interesting.

Eve: As a writer or aspiring writer, what does it mean to you to write into the henceforward, into the future? How do you plan to do so?

Speaker 3: As much as I want to be strong in my contentions and strong in my opinion, I do have this fear of this might come back to haunt me one day when the person who is reading it will not understand my intent or will want to manipulate the intent, so

that fear of putting things down permanently, I think that a lot of people of color really feel because sure, it's great to be authentic, but then authentic has a lot of consequences.

Speaker 4: Be kind in your criticism of yourself and others and in building relationships, being generous through kindness I think is going to be the way.

Speaker 5: The best concept I can think of is the Dish with One Spoon, treaty welcome with the Haudenosaunee, and the ideas that the land and the resources are a dish with one spoon. We have these responsibilities to our environment to share what's inside, and the reason why there's only one spoon is because we have to share it amongst each other. It's a spoon and not a knife because it has no sharp edges.

Sefanit: This segment weaves together commentary on bodies and land. Eve Tuck sets the stage for ruminating on land as epistemology, land as a way of knowing.

Eve: While critical disability studies is concerned with the body, Indigenous studies is concerned with the importance of land. Land is relationship, it is peoplehood, it is epistemology, it is curriculum, and it is ancestor for Indigenous peoples. It is exactly what is ignored in almost every aspect of teaching and learning in settler societies. This is why in our work, we emphasize that settler colonialism and its decolonization is about land, it is about land, it is about land.

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Sefanit: In their closing plenary, Tanya Titchkosky and Nirmala Erevelles talked about what it means to decolonize disability studies, touching on issues of damage, dispossession and intersectionality. First, we hear from Tanya Titchkosky.

Tanya: One obvious difficulty is that we can and do relate to our bodies like finished books, not as makers of questions but as substance, clear certain stuff that is we can and do relate to our bodies as quite unlike questions and quite like things.

Indeed, racism depends on this. In our writing, bodies can and do appear like finished books, and not as the meeting point for questions. Sometimes, we even judge bodies by their covers. Regarding intersectionality as a living phenomenon means respecting a basic assumption. We do meet, we are interpretative beings caught in our interpretations of others, and their interpretations of us, where Merleau-Ponty says the consciousness of other consciousnesses situated in the midst of stolen land and stolen people, and the norms of colonial power.

As Therí Pickens reminds us, "Categorized is simply a body. Critics may run the risk of circumscribing the ethnic body back into racist or imperialist discourse." It seems that there would come in practice today to say, well, bodies are missing here, or where are the bodies of color, or where is the Indigenous body, or even more generally, I see who's missing.

I'm sure that such body talks scares as a stand into the certainty of the necessity of showing our relation to Blackness, to brownness, indigeneity, and other categories of exclusion. Still, this requires signification where the Aime Cesaire, Fanon's teacher, says is equivalent to colonization. Signification is colonization when treating one expression as if it represents the whole of the matter, and as if it permits us to launch into kind of exclusive mastery even ownership of the thing so named, even missing bodies.

Sefanit: Nirmala Erevelles continues to speak about embodiment and place-based arguments.

Nirmala: By recognizing and actually learning with much humility from indeed, the Indigenous scholars I've cited here and others that I should be citing, about the violence of settler colonialism, I cautiously ask, what are we refusing when we refuse damage? From another point of view, I'm also asking, how does one celebrate the conditions that create bodies damaged by the violence of settler colonialism?

On one hand, I'm raising the issue of kind of like terror at engaging with the issue of damage because of what it may mean in the context of how we've understood disability, normatively in the context of damage, and in the same context, in the context of notions of disability pride, which is moving on the other side, I'm asking how does disability pride engage with the violence that constitutes some bodies as damaged?

I ask these questions to mark the real tension between disability studies and Indigenous studies when we engage into sections that are right with structures that seem at the same time to harm, and at the same time also appear to heal.

By crippling Indigenous studies, I introduce the concept of embodiment within the violent practices of dislocation. In other words, I'm arguing that settler colonialism is an act of conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, displacement, all embodied acts that reshape the body and deform as well as reform the normal. It is because of how it refuses normativity that horrific violence is meted out against disabled bodies.

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In other words, I'm asking for us to shift the focus a little and to ask, drawing on what I just argued, how does a place-based argument also engage the violence meted out against embodied subjectivities?

I argue that dispossession is itself an exploitative action of appropriation, not just of land, but of lifestyle, ideology, and of the very meaning of the bodies that were

dispossessed. How does this land based argument engage embodiment at that precise historical moment when race, disability, gender and queerness intersect?

Speaker 6: Writing into or toward the henceforward or for the henceforward to me means creating things that I think my future self would like to read.

Speaker 7: Writing for the people that you want to read your work. I think that really clears a lot of space to not be afraid to you don't have to worry about courage because you're not going to be upsetting anybody. You're not going to be building any enemies because if you're writing for people who want to read your work, you're offering insight, you're offering something that they really want.

Speaker 8: To me, writing into the henceforward means writing in a way that embraces possibility.

Deanna: We close the episode by bringing it back to the heart of the conference -- writing. In this section, we have Eve Tuck on the audiences that we're writing for, Veronica Velez on writing collectively and making jam, and Eve Tuck and Rinaldo Walcott on settler colonialism, anti-blackness, and looking up for one another.

First, Eve Tuck on writing to one another followed by Rinaldo Walcott on looking out for each other.

Eve: Writing is not something that is fixed. Lots of times when people approach academic writing, they do it with a pre-conceived notion about who their audience is and what their audience expects of them.

I think of this as a kind of imagined voice in our head or on our shoulder that's always telling us that our work is not good enough, that we have to sound this certain way in order to make an argument that we have to make our words come together in certain chains in order to be convincing or believed. I want us to really work to disbelieve that voice in our heads, because actually, we are each other's readers.

We deny each other's presence when we act like we're writing for some asshole who does not really ever read our work. We read each other's work, and so we need to write to each other in a way that is kind, and generous, and anticipates what questions we might have. Not to somebody who's never going to read us anyway.

Eve (in conversation with Rinaldo):

I acknowledge that the ways that we are in relationship to each other is completely managed and shaped and overdetermined by white supremacy, by anti-blackness, by Indigenous genocide and erasure. We can't wish it away in terms of how we can begin to make our way into another conversation.

I think we can let go of the expectation that all of us have to fasten together in some sort of similar unit. I think we can be generous with each other. I think we can give permission to each other to try to be together in a new way or an old way, and part of that practice in terms of our writing might be that we, in very real ways think of each other, think of you, think of me as our audience.

Rinaldo: Or some months ago when the Turtle government announced this cabinet, and it was minus Black people. Leanne Simpson wrote that piece where she raised the question of what does it mean to celebrate Indigenous exclusion, inclusion into those cabinet, when there are no Black people present at all in the cabinet. I think to me, what that opens up is the question of what kinds of conversations that we can have in which we look out for each other's well-being.

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Deanna: And Veronica Velez on writing into the academy in new ways.

Veronica: What does it mean to be a writer in the academy? It's usually one that's individualized, usually one that doesn't honor the collective, usually one that is really isolating. I found myself sort of stuck in that paradigm because you're a professor, you're trying to figure out what are the terms of success in the space, and struggled really hard my first few years to write.

Then I came across this piece, Michelle Téllez wrote this piece in *The Feminist Wire*, and she calls it *Why We Must Write: A Reflection on Tenure Denial and Coloring Between the Lines*. She writes specifically as a Chicana who was the tenure at her institution and talks about the experiences of writing in that context.

Writings tells our truth and we are here to bear witness with our writing. This is why we must write. I know longer believe that writing has to be done only in isolation, writing collectively challenges a neoliberal, individualistic institution that encourages us to do things alone and through collective writing, we find meanings and experience.

But when I saw this, it gave me language to think more deeply about what is the spiritual and political project to write? How do we do this collectively? This cannot be done in isolation. Asking the questions, for what or for whom do you this work? It's sort of a lesson that Michelle Téllez leaves me with around how do we think about this in a different way? Can we do this project of writing in a different way in the academy? How do we build that space for us to make things possible?

What I didn't show, and I wanted to show the most recent sort of hopeful piece in this. There's a group of women at my institution that we've been meeting about monthly, we're trying to hopefully meet more often, but we're trying to build some collective writing projects together. One of the things that has been so powerful,

most of them are native women at Western, and we've been writing collectively as we do make jam.

We've been writing, making jam, canning tomatoes, and then coming back to the space and thinking about what the very process of writing means to us. They've given me sort of a way to kind of reconfigure some of these ideas as well.

Sefanit: The Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education Conference took place over the course of a full day. We combed through the recordings and pulled out some of the moments that stood out to us; moments that helped us to consider our audience, that excited us, that presented important questions, and allowed us to imagine all that our writing makes possible.

We hope that listening to this episode has also inspired you to write into the henceforward.

Eve: The Henceforward, Indigenous and Black life on Turtle Island.

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