Distributed Labour: Managing Harmful Language Work in A Canadian Library Partnership

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(Ontario Council of University Libraries - Collaborative Futures)

Agenda

- Broader librarianship context

- Purpose for our work

- OCUL (Ontario Council of University Library) Context

- Steps we're working on in OCUL

- Discuss

What is the catalogue?

- Cataloguing either is not taught in library school, or is not mandatory. Metadata and cataloguing jobs and professional voices are undervalued and undermined at many - but not all - institutions, as we collectively rely on singular powers with "easy" solutions (academic vendors/publishers, OCLC, LC)
- Do cataloguers have influence when vendors control so much?
- Is the catalogue an historic record or living system? How does this impact changing subject headings and conducting research on historic subject headings? (e.g. female friendship usage in Stahl's "Uncontrollable Vocabularies: Queer Theory, Sexual Identity, and the Catalog") Is this niche research more important than removing harmful language as a primary access point?

- We have printed card catalogue records and guidebooks for AACR & AACR2. Now systems are much more ephemeral, and discussions are only accessible to a handful of professionals, rarely with end-users involved
- Wikipedia has discussions for every page, whereas catalogue records are generally discussed either internally, on a list, or through library of congress meetings/webpages that end users will never interact with (https://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/subject/meetings-change.pdf)
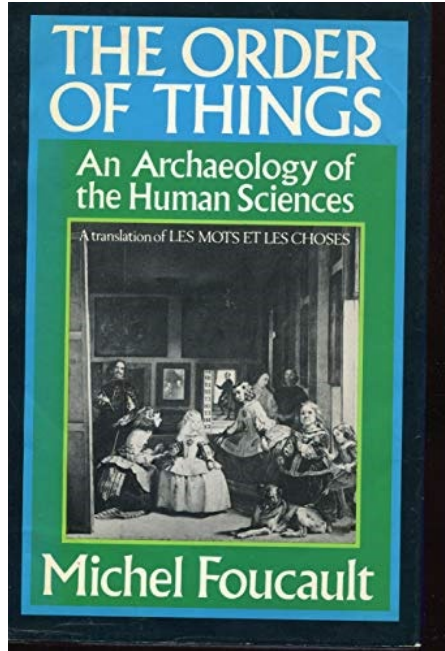
Michel Foucault *The Order of Things*

"What transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a,b,c,d) which links each of these categories to all the others"

Beyond this pithy quote about categorization, *The Order of Things* relates to the power that the catalogue has in presenting information to users. Although there are many ways to access materials now, we are still responsible for a huge corpus. I have seen a lot of librarians and library staff question the necessity of harmful language statements on books about science, business, etc., not seeing their privileged position in making these claims.

Autocat! Hiding behind "neutrality" and "objectivity" to maintain hegemonic control

- Who cannot speak or is not allowed to speak, and how are they represented in the library, the university, and in research? How are trans/gender non-conforming, autistic people, colonized people, and the subaltern excluded by this lists' & our professions moderation?

- Autocat moderators are more interested in policing limited non-verbal responses rather than listening to people who tell them their practices are hurtful and help spread harmful opinions as a scientific truth

From: AUTOCAT ████████████████████████████
Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2024 4:57:21 PM
To: AUTOCAT ████████████
Subject: [AUTOCAT] Reminder: Please do not use email reaction feature

You don't often get email from ████████████ Learn why this is important

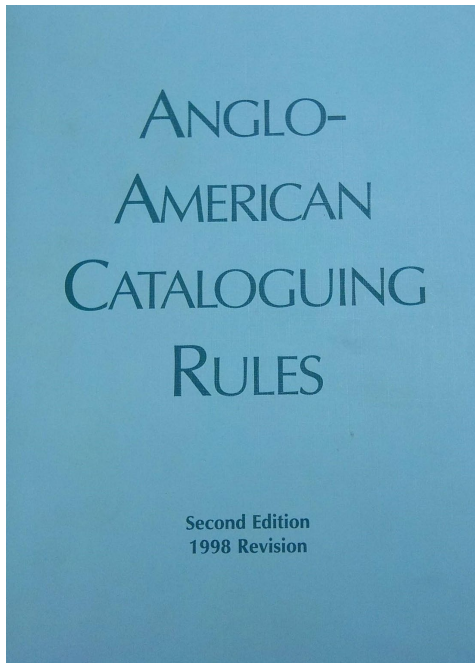Caution: External email.
Good afternoon AUTOCAT,

This is a reminder to ALL users NOT to use the email reaction feature (see example below). These reactions are sent out as individual e-mails that go to the entire list.
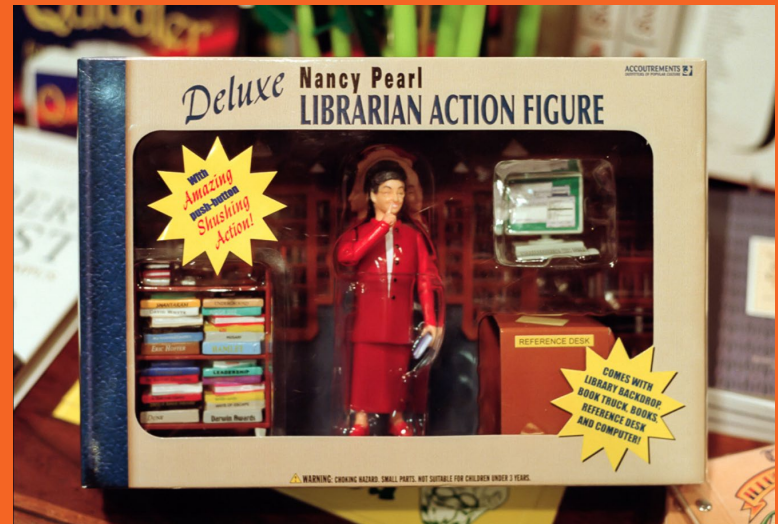
like **First Name Last Name** reacted to your message:

Thanks for your help.

████ Co-moderator

Anglo American bias in Library Science

ANGLO-AMERICAN CATALOGUING RULES

Second Edition
1998 Revision

In what ways has your voice been shushed throughout your career?

Deluxe Nancy Pearl LIBRARIAN ACTION FIGURE

ACCOUTREMENTS

With Amazing push-button Shushing Action!

REFERENCE DESK

COMES WITH LIBRARY BACKDROP, BOOK TRUCK, BOOKS, REFERENCE DESK AND COMPUTER!

WARNING: CHOKING HAZARD. SMALL PARTS. NOT SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 3 YEARS.

Trans people are telling cataloguers how they want to be represented in catalogue records and how they want to engage with library materials about them. Yet they are met with responses like "we must remain neutral, I am a cataloguer not a subject expert and we all must be differential to professional values" etc.

"By adopting the law, a falsely submissive soul manages to evade it and to taste pleasures it was supposed to forbid" -Deleuze

Gilles Deleuze
Difference and Repetition

revelations

BLOOMSBURY
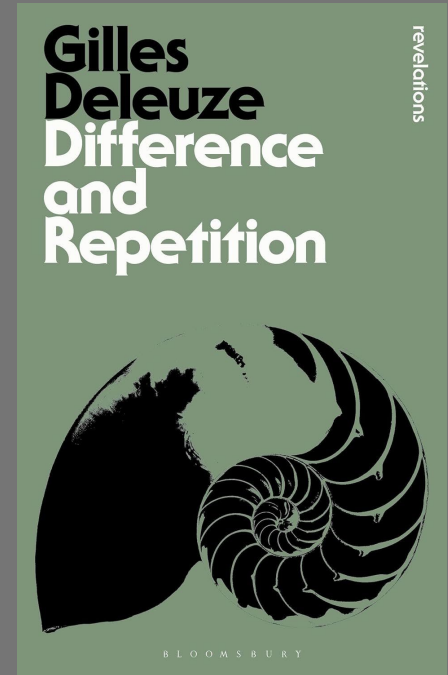
- We draw on the term science to legitimize our profession, and we have embraced a lot of the politics of modern science along with it. Like natural sciences we try to observe and classify things, and this work has immense power to shape realities.
- The notion that we can or should try and be objective and removed from the application of our work comes from a position of privilege, and feminist criticism of science from the 1980s are relevant criticisms of the library science field today

DONNA HARAWAY *SITUATED KNOWLEDGES: THE SCIENCE QUESTION IN FEMINISM AND THE PRIVILEGE OF PARTIAL PERSPECTIVE*

The Science Question in Feminism

Winner of the 1987 Jessie Bernard Award of the American Sociological Association.

Sandra Harding

"Academic and activist feminist inquiry has repeatedly tried to come to terms with the question of what we might mean by the curious and inescapable term "objectivity." We have used a lot toxic ink and trees processed into paper decrying what they have meant and how it hurts us"

"Recent social studies of science and technology, for example, have made available a very strong social constructionist argument for all forms of knowledge claims … [that] no insider's perspective is privileged, because all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves toward truth"

"(Sandra) Harding calls this necessary multiple desire a need for a successor science project and a postmodern insistence on irreducible difference and radical multiplicity of local knowledges"
We can see the effect of postmodernism in librarianship in embracing multiple vocabularies, yet some unwritten or lost rules of cataloguing still hold so much sway over our work
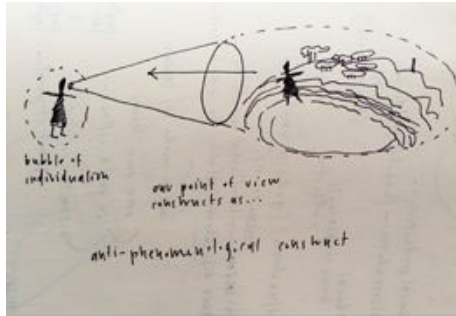
Haraway cont.

DONNA HARAWAY
Situated Knowledges:
The Science Question
in Feminism and the
Privilege of
Partial Perspective

Feminists don't need a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence… We don't want a theory of innocent powers to represent the world, where language and bodies both fall into the bliss of organic symbiosis. We also don't want to theorize the world, much less act within it, in terms of Global Systems, but we do need an earthwide network of connections… we need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made… in order to… have a chance for life. (580)
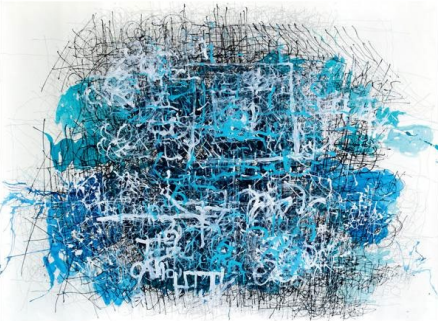
Haraway cont.

"From this point of view, science… is rhetoric, a series of efforts to persuade relevant social actors that one's manufactured knowledge is a route to a desired form of very objective power"

M. Remi Yergeau *Authoring Autism*

melanie yergeau

AUTHORING autism

/ on rhetoric and neurological queerness

Where does rhetoric lie? This question has many meanings, many potential interpretations. When I ask where rhetoric lies, I want to know both where it resides and where it deceives…

—

Yergeau cont.

"I am interested in looking at where rhetoric lies because such questions inform what we think of as symbolic or socially shared: In what ways is symbolism central to rhetorical action? ...Rhetoric has its own traditional quarters, but it redisposes itself when autistic bodies make themselves known."

Yergeau cont.

"rhetoric's arrangements forcibly absent the autistic. That is, rhetoric builds spaces that occlude the autistic because the autistic supposedly represents the asocial edges of rhetoric"
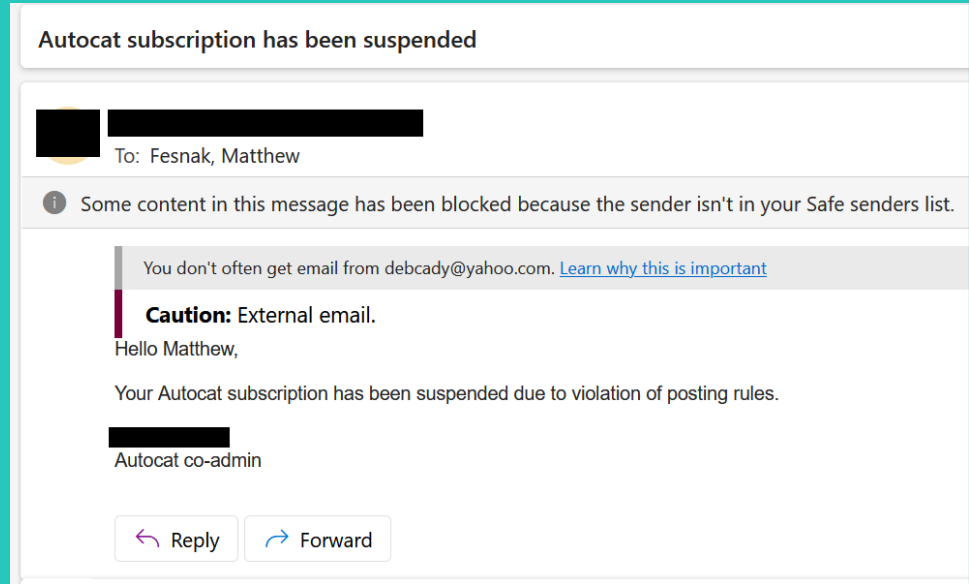
Context for our work: critical cataloguing practices

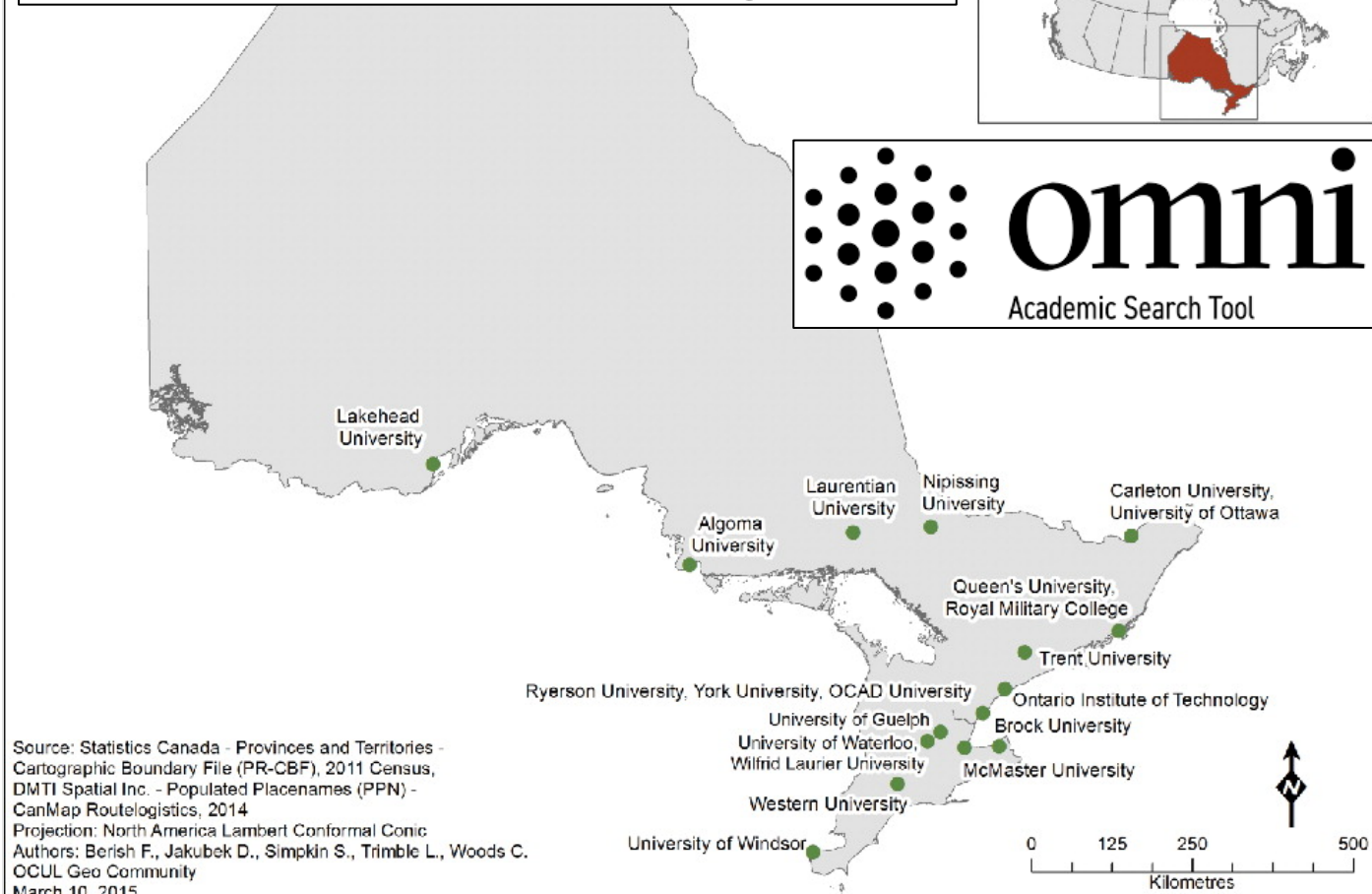| Anglo American politeness, neutrality, and policing	Available vocabularies	Not PCC/NACO/SACO	Consultation	Research & labour
Maintaining dominant norms	Not every cataloguer is ready to embrace something like RBMS CVRMC' Prejudicial works, waiting on NIKLA's Respectful Terminology Platform Project	Influencing LC might not be possible, or worth our time (plurality is good)	Outside purview of cataloguers role	Many OCUL schools have limited cataloguing/metadata expertise, and minimal capacity to do the work

- OCUL is a consortia of 21 university libraries in Ontario, Canada
- Collaborative Futures Initiative, Omni (19 of 21 OCUL Partners)
- Over 25 million items in our collaborative holdings
- Not like SUNY or the University of California systems, all OCUL universities and libraries are relatively independent public institutions

OCUL Ontario Council of University Libraries

omni Academic Search Tool

Lakehead University

Laurentian University

Nipissing University

Carleton University, University of Ottawa

Algoma University

Queen's University, Royal Military College

Trent University

Ryerson University, York University, OCAD University

Ontario Institute of Technology

University of Guelph

Brock University

University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University

McMaster University

Western University

University of Windsor

Source: Statistics Canada - Provinces and Territories - Cartographic Boundary File (PR-CBF), 2011 Census, DMTI Spatial Inc. - Populated Placenames (PPN) - CanMap Routelogistics, 2014
Projection: North America Lambert Conformal Conic
Authors: Berish F., Jakubek D., Simpkin S., Trimble L., Woods C.
OCUL Geo Community
March 10, 2015

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Kilometres

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March 10, 2015

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Context for our Work

- OCUL-CF Metadata Management and Standards Subcommittee
  - Decolonizing Descriptions Implementation Working Group Members:
    - Andrea Bee (University of Guelph)
    - **Matthew Fesnak** (McMaster University)
    - Gillian Dunks (McMaster University)
    - Sarah Butterill (OCAD University)
    - Eva Lu (University of Waterloo)
    - Larisa Smyk (University of Waterloo)
    - **Christina Zoricic** (Western University)
    - Anika Ervin-Ward (OCUL (ex officio))

Context for our Work

- Decolonizing Descriptions Implementation Working Group mandate
  - [Decolonizing Descriptions Working Group Final Report](#)
  - The work of DDIWG is guided by the report recommendations of the previous group DDWG
    - Antonio Munoz Gomez
    - Erin Bourgard
    - Tim Knight
    - Mandy Deans Kassies (ex officio)

Context for our work: DDWG Final Report

10 recommendations divided into three larger themes/issues:

- relationship building and consultation
- critical evaluation of library records/descriptive practices
- technical capabilities in Alma

Browse by subject

To begin, select one of the turtle's *scutes* or one of the subject headings.

Image source from the University of Saskatchewan - University Library - I-portal: Indigenous Studies Portal
https://iportal.usask.ca/

Section	Reviewer	Actionable Items	Action Type	Local or OCUL	Timeline	Priority	Feasibility/Barriers	Collaborate With	Not
1. Recommendations and next steps	Larisa	Each institution to add alternate terminology as local subject heading in IZ(a ~~list is identified~~ examples provided in ~~Section 3.2 Appendix 8~~)	~~Metadata~~ Metadata only after Indigenous consultations	Local	~~Short~~ Short only for 2-3 Sl	High ?	Consultations should be run first	~~CF-MMS~~ Indigenous communities, local staff members	Report recommends to add "Indigen SH. Since they since now valid LCSH, t adding and/or replacing them as LCSl
		Explore the creation and maintenance (via Authority Control Task List) of local authority records in NZ	Metadata	OCUL	Long	Low	B	Local staff members, Network Zone Metadata Maintenance Working Group, CF-MMS	We may do it using Canadian authors examples.
		~~OCUL~~ Libraries' staff with representatives from CF and beyond, to review current cataloguing practice for resources by and/or about indigenous Peoples	Metadata	~~OCUL~~ local	Long-term	Low	Creation of alternative vocabulary should be done first. Labour and time consuming tasks.	Consultations, local staff members, CF-MMS	As a first step of cataloguing practice similar to Western one can be recom
		Add disclaimer(s) (statement of acknowledgement to institution website or bib records	Acknowledgement	Local + OCUL	Middle-term	High	How to do it technically? Who supposed to do it?	CF-MMS	We may run an information session f recommendations and listen to their
2. Relationship Building and the Consultation Process	Eva	Have a meeting with Indigenous community members/societies to introduce yourself, goals, the library; listen + understand their needs	Indigenous consultation	Local	Short - term			Will we need to collaborate with Truth and Reconciliation Group?	When performing the Consultation Sl was involved in the meeting and wha Check with institution about compen Consultation
		Contact other Indigenous groups in your area and see how else we could better our collections or support them	Indigenous consultation	Local	Middle-term				
		Co-op Opportunities	Indigenous consultation	Local	Short-term				
3. Decolonizing description: the current landscape	Sarah	Conduct 2nd survey of OCUL/CF members to understand current work being done	OCUL school consultation	Local + OCUL	Middle-term				Do we want to send this out before o new initiatives? What is our goal in d
		Become participating members of NIKLA	Financial support	Local + OCUL	Long-term				
		Update report's environmental scan of alternative vocabularies, as there have been changes since report was written	Metadata	OCUL					
		Examine potential alternative thesauri for inclusion in OCUL-CF policy on Acceptable Subject Thesauri	Metadata	OCUL				CF-MMS	
		Develop locally or consortially created authorities	Metadata	Local + OCUL				CF-MMS Network Zone Metadata Maintenance Working Group	
		Increase staff resources + coordination of this project @OCUL level	Training	OCUL	Long-term				
4. Authority control and maintenance in Alma	Andrea	Ensure all OCUL libraries have enabled the Authorities – Link BIB Headings and Authorities – Preferred Term Correction – BIB Headings (should already be done)	Training	OCUL		High			
		Investigate if consortially managed local authorities is possible in NZ	Metadata	OCUL	Long-term			Network Zone Metadata Maintenance Working Group	If not possible or feasible, make reco enhancements
		Develop framework/workflow/recommendations for IZ (and/or NZ) authority management via the Authority Control Task List (monitoring and responding to reports)	Metadata	OCUL	Middle-term			Network Zone Metadata Maintenance Working Group	
		Craft suggested workflow for retroactive							

Context for our work:
Recommendations as a way forward

acknowledge

Acknowledge the problem.

(This is where we're at, collectively.)

identify

Connected to statement development

(what we're actively doing to make a difference)

consult

Relationship building and showing up (locally, OCULy, and beyond)

change

Interim changes? Local vocabulary (and CSH, LCSH, RVM, etc)

Plan for NZ Authority Control?

maintain

How is this going to look in the long term? How will we connect with NIKLA RTPP work?

Policy Overview: Statement on Problematic or Harmful Language

- All participating Omni Libraries will have a statement on their library website acknowledging the historical and current context of the construction of their catalogue
- Commitment to do better
- Specific language up to each institution (in consultation with their local communities)
- Feedback mechanism - required
- Accountability for actions and public display

Best Practices

- We've compiled examples to help OCUL schools with their statement, including how to come up with appropriate language, how to display the statement, and related tasks

- We recommend reference to institutional goals, future steps, and approaches to CFLA calls to action

- Links to unlearning and further info

- Importance of a feedback mechanism

Sarah Ahmed *On Being Included*

"what does diversity do? What are we doing when we use the language of diversity? We might… ask whether the ease of its incorporation by institutions is a sign of the loss of its critical edge"
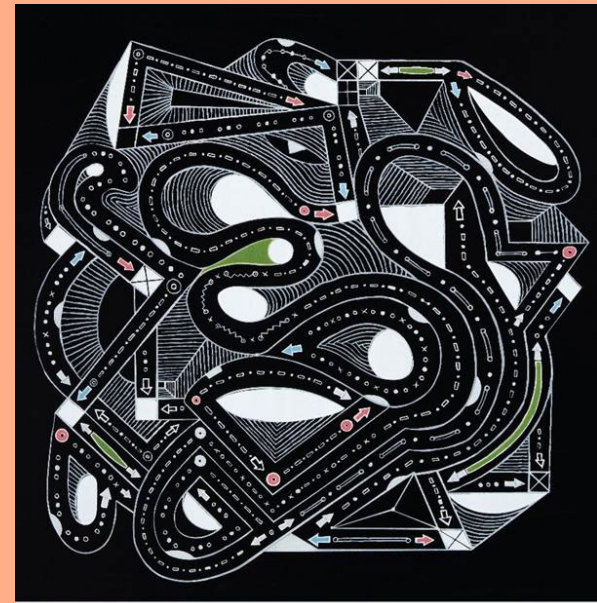
ON BEING **INCLUDED**

Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life

Sara Ahmed

Using Indigenous subject headings at Ontario's Queen's Park

Librarianship & academic freedom

Do you have the freedom to write a statement and make catalogue changes representative of justice or merely unobtrusive diversity?

Have you had bosses walk back your work on metadata justice to align with university values?

Has your workplace supported your efforts? Do you struggle to make time for everything you'd like to do? How do you manage your metadata justice initiatives?

Jamboard link

Discuss -

Respectful Terminology vs. Offensive Content/Description:
Blanket disclaimer? Vs. targeted statements on records?
How do you approach this? Has your institution implemented
anything like this?
Jamboard link

Concept - System of oppression - Who decides what is and is not
offensive? How many times have we caused harm by making
assumptions?

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