Knowing One’s Power: Decolonial Approaches to Curatorial Practice

By

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative analysis of *Re(as)sisting Narratives* (2016) and *Kahatenhstánion tsi na'tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December* (2017), two contemporary art exhibitions that self-identify as engaged with decolonial politics.

The comparative analysis considers how the projects’ curators define and apply decoloniality in the following ways: through the refusal and appropriation of written language; through the integration of multilingualism; and the use of spatialized metaphor. I then consider how such decisions are reflected in curatorial decisions concerning exhibition design and selection of art works.

Following this close reading, I conclude with a definition of decoloniality that proposes the application of resource redistribution through the development of Indigenous and settler allegiances. In partnership with settler-identified peoples who are committed to unknowing their power, curatorial practice can be a political tool that supports repatriation through the construction of a reparations economy.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. iii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................... iv
List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................ vi
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1
Chapter 1: Literature Review .................................................................................................................. 7
  Colonization ......................................................................................................................................... 8
  Decolonization/Decoloniality .................................................................................................................. 10
  Indigeneity .......................................................................................................................................... 13
  Language ........................................................................................................................................... 15
  Exhibition .......................................................................................................................................... 20
  Curator .............................................................................................................................................. 23
Chapter 2: Knowing One’s Power .......................................................................................................... 25
  “Curator” versus “Facilitator” ............................................................................................................ 26
  Exhibition versus Gesture .................................................................................................................... 33
  Multilingualism ................................................................................................................................. 40
  Spatialized metaphor: “Line,” “Center” versus Outside” ................................................................... 59
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................ 66
Bibliography .......................................................................................................................................... 71
List of Figures

Figure 1 - Installation view from SBC Gallery entrance ........................................... 28

Figure 2 - A public intervention in the Transvaalbuurt ........................................ 36

Figure 3 - Installation of Onthou djy nog ................................................................. 38

Figure 4 - Screenshot of English-translated webpage for Wood Land School ...... 41

Figure 5 - Screenshot of French-translated webpage for Wood Land School ....... 42

Figure 6 - Mohawk-translated webpage for Wood Land School ............................ 43

Figure 7 - Screenshot of English-translated webpage for Re(as)sisting Narratives 44

Figure 8 - Screenshot of Dutch-translated webpage for Re(as)sisting Narratives .... 45

Figure 9 - Joi Arcand, (ēkāwiya nēpēwisi) .............................................................. 48

Figure 10 - Installation view of Joi Arcand, (ēkāwiya nēpēwisi) ......................... 49

Figure 11 - Installation view of Wood Land School: Kahatenhstánion tsi na’tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December .............. 50

Figure 12 - Upper level installation of Straatpraatj(i)es: Remember to Onthou ........ 54

Figure 13 - Lower level installation of Straatpraatj(i)es: Remember to Onthou ........ 56
Introduction

In the United States, the cultural and sociopolitical implications of colonization have garnered significant media focus as a result of environmental upheaval. The recent executive orders that advanced the installation of the Dakota Access Pipeline on the sacred lands of Dakota and Lakota peoples, as well as the proposal to reduce Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante, represent a clear federal positionality on Indigenous political and territorial sovereignty (Meyer). Following Hurricane Maria, the paucity of federal relief efforts in Puerto Rico signifies a desire to maintain the inferior socio-political and economic status of the commonwealth. The United States government has never publicly acknowledged the ramifications of colonialism and slavery in the form of a truth and reconciliation commission, which reflects this commitment to inaction on a juridical level.

Resistance to colonial governance has been imagined and enacted since western european invasions of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Australia. This resistance is termed “decolonization” or the formal transfer of power that encompasses a wide range of political, economic, social, and cultural activity. For the purposes of this thesis, I consider decolonization to be a socio-political philosophy that challenges Enlightenment ideals of modernity and racial capitalism.

In the past two years, the term “decolonization” has circulated the field of contemporary art curation and has been the subject of symposiums, protests, and exhibitions in the United States, where I live and work as a performance curator. In 2016, the collective MTL+ organized “Decolonize This Place,” a community action hub at New York City’s Artists Space that supported political organizing around Black Lives Matter, prison abolition, Indigenous sovereignty, Free Palestine, and art-washing. In the same year, considerations
around decolonial aesthetics became the subject of public debate at the New York City-based performance festival American Realness, during which curators Jenny Schlenzka and Ben Pryor were criticized for their decision to program French choreographer’s Latifa Laâbissi’s *Self Portrait Camouflage*. In this work, Laâbissi wears a faux Lakota ceremonial war bonnet (Pryor). In 2018, Olga Viso stepped down as Executive Director of the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota following the installation and subsequent burial of *Scaffold*, a sculpture by Los Angeles-based artist Sam Durant. The piece was widely condemned by Indigenous peoples because it references the architecture of gallows that executed Dakota men in Minnesota in 1862 (Chow).

Each of these cases demonstrate how curators are situated in public discourse as political agents, and how professional, personal, and political accountability can be publicly demanded. They point to how curatorial decision making, like any action, has implications that can (and do) reverberate beyond its intended scope. As a result of these circumstances, curatorial practice has come under necessary scrutiny for its perpetuation of colonial epistemologies. For an early career curator observing and participating in these dialogues, I desired a system of “best practices,” a pragmatic framework that would help me avoid these kinds of political and ethical pitfalls. How can decolonization be operationalized on a day to day basis, in interactions with artist-collaborators, colleagues, funders, and publics? In its crudest sense, I desired to explain to myself why I am invested in a profession whose foundation is in western eurocentric colonial values.

In my desire to define a pragmatic and ethical approach to decolonial curatorial practice, I have also felt charged to confront my subjective relationship to “indigeneity.” As a Nuyorican who has long referred to myself as a “Native” New Yorker, I had not—until
recently--consciously considered the impact of my Taino heritage on my curatorial practice. To add to this complexity, I am the daughter of first generation Puerto Ricans whose families moved from the island to New York City due to the economic inequities of imperial conquest. Yet, through an Indigenous studies lens, I am still considered a settler colonial subject.

I was further compelled to ask such questions of myself when I served as an associate curator of the 2017 American Realness Festival “Discourse” platform, during which I hosted public dialogues and commissioned written reflections about the Festival program. Initially, I did not include any conversations that considered Indigenous artistic practices. Even though I saw the now-controversial promotional image for SelfPortrait Camouflage (which features a naked Laâbissi’s wearing a war bonnet) dozens of times in drafts of the festival brochure, my criticality was not piqued until reactions of colleagues and Indigenous artists surfaced on social media. Through this formative professional experience, it became clear to me that my understanding of Indigenous political perspectives and artistic practices was in need of critical care. I desired to be able to more pointedly define decoloniality, both personally and professionally, and to generate action steps in order to hold myself accountable to my learnings.

My commitment to gaining the pragmatic and ethical approaches to a decolonial curatorial practice instigated this thesis subject and motivated me to seek out contemporary art exhibitions that explicitly self-identify as operating within a decolonial political framework. I am also interested in the phenomenon of truth and reconciliation commissions, why such a process has not been initiated in the United States, and how U.S. Americans
consider the presence of colonization in the context of their day to day lives. These considerations scaffold the direction of my research.

In this thesis, I present a comparative analysis of two contemporary art exhibitions: *Re(as)sisting Narratives*, curated by Dutch-South African curator Chandra Frank at Framer Framed in Amsterdam, Netherlands and the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa (2016) and *Kahatenhstánion tsi na'tetiatere ne Iotohrkö:wa tánon Iotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December*, presented at SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montreal, Canada (2017-2018) by the Wood Land School, a collaborative of First Nations visual artists and curators Duane Linklater, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Walter Scott, and cheyenne turions. Through this comparative analysis, I consider how each curator uses written language to articulate their decolonial politics and approaches to exhibition design. More specifically, I consider how the organizers strategically use or refuse vocabulary and spatialized metaphor to express their relationship with settler coloniality. Close analyses of selected artworks from each exhibition consider how decolonial politics are communicated aesthetically, and how choices on exhibition sites and artwork installation challenge and recast Enlightenment philosophies of linearity and modernity.

In a desire to consider the potential political reverberations of restorative justice initiatives on curatorial practice, I choose to focus my analyses on these exhibitions because they are hosted in nations that have undergone formal truth and reconciliation processes. Because I first encountered these exhibitions through online research, I was primarily exposed to curator-authored texts rather than the sensorial information I would have received by visiting the galleries in person. The relationship between decolonial curatorial intent and its application through written language is the theoretical entrypoint for my research.
Following this introduction, I theoretically ground my thesis in a literature review. The subsections of this chapter outline how I define key concepts in my argument and trace the scholarly lineages I draw upon to support my positionality. I apply the concepts defined in the literature review to analyze curator-authored exhibition texts and specific artworks in *Re(as)sisting Narratives* and *Drawing Lines*. The comparative analysis considers how the projects’ curators define and apply decoloniality in the following ways: through the refusal and appropriation of written language; through the integration of multilingualism; and the use of spatialized metaphor. The textual and visual analyses also inform the thesis conclusion, which outlines my working definition of decoloniality and how I support this political framework through the development of a reparations economy. Ultimately, I propose that decolonial curatorial practice is the process that refuses the metaphorical use of “decolonial” if it is not applied to address how curators promote Indigenous and Black access to capital resources with the support of settler allegiances. I also consider decoloniality as a process that acknowledges the rhizomatic relationship of settler colonial and Indigenous communities, and how this adjacency can be stewarded towards the support of Indigenous and Black-led artistic practices.

My thesis encourages increased dialogue and attention among curators about “situatedness,” or what I define as critical engagement with how curatorial practice is politically and personally rooted. When curators identify their positionalities within in a political ecosystem, accountability can be more clearly traced and enacted. These accountability systems do not operate through the violent rhetoric of call-out culture. Rather, I believe in the development of supportive professional networks that provide curators with
opportunities to improve their practices in ways that are responsive to public discourse and conflict.
Chapter 1 - Literature Review

In this literature review, I present an overview of the key terms and theoretical frameworks that have informed my research methodology and critical perspectives on decoloniality and curatorial practice. For clarity, this chapter is divided into subsections, and the title of each subsection identifies the terms I proceed to analyze. I envision this section as a glossary of terminology that the reader can refer to as they move through subsequent chapters of the thesis.

I historicize colonization within the context of Canada, the Netherlands, and South Africa and focus specifically on how colonial governmentality imposes restrictions to citizenship through land seizure. I emphasize Canada and South Africa’s shared history of truth and reconciliation commissions to consider the political utility of this process. Through an analysis of the prefixes “de” and “post,” I propose that truth and reconciliation commissions reflect Enlightenment ideals of linear progress (or “post-colonization”), while decolonization is an active process of undoing political, social, and cultural paradigms and in so doing, refute linear temporality.

I then consider how the Enlightenment notion of linearity is articulated through written language. With a specific focus on how binaristic dualism informs concepts of space and time, I unpack how such philosophies precipitated the development of the exhibitionary complex and the evolution of curatorial practice. Proceeding the literature review, I apply these key terms to a comparative analysis of Drawing Lines and Re(as)sisting Narratives. I examine how the curators strategically use written language to define “decolonial” approaches to authorship, spatial politics, resource allocation, and notions of cultural authenticity.
Colonization

Colonization is a practice of political, economic, and cultural domination of one population over another. More specifically, it is defined as the act of one settling on land of which one is a foreigner and asserting control over the Indigenous populations of that land. The etymology of “colony” is derived from the Latin word *colonus*, which means farmer. This etymology is indicative of how closely linked colonization is to territorialization. Western European colonization involved the imposition of political and economic superiority through military occupation, territorial annexation, and other predatory strategies rooted in land dispossession, Indigenous population control, and criminalization of Indigenous cultural traditions.

*Re(as)sisting Narratives* and *Drawing Lines* take place in the Netherlands, South Africa, and Canada respectively, countries that are linked in their shared legacies of colonial dispossession. In 1885, prior to the enactment of the Indian Act, the Canadian government instituted a “Pass Law.” This de jure policing practice enforced the separation of First Nations peoples and settlers, as it required First Nations peoples to stay on reserves unless they obtained a travel permit (Barron 39). If disobeyed, First Nations peoples faced incarceration. British and Dutch governments executed a similar system of colonial governance in South Africa. Implemented in 1797, “Pass Laws” required Black South Africans to carry passports that controlled movement around the country. The laws not only restricted citizenship rights for Black laborers, but they also denied them land ownership. Passport holders were legally bound to white-inhabited regions of the country so that they were readily accessible to Dutch and British farmers as an exploited labor force (Magubane 23). In both Canada and South Africa, colonial governments enforced their dominance
through federal regulations on land tenure, voting, and practice of ancestral cultural traditions.

Canada and South Africa also share a history of undergoing formal truth and reconciliation commissions (Fairweather 188). These restorative justice bodies sought to acknowledge the human rights violations committed by colonial governments—like the abuses legislated by the Pass Laws—against Indigenous populations. They aimed to recast the role of governments in “post-colonial” societies, and proposed reconciliation through policy recommendations and suggestions for legal implementation. The critique of the truth and reconciliation commissions in both Canada and South Africa is precisely in the use of the prefix “post.” The discourses generated by these commissions historicize colonialism along a linear timeline, wherein colonialism is misleadingly constructed as a condition of the past that does not have contemporary political relevance (Nagy).
Decolonization/Decoloniality

Generally speaking, “decolonization” refers to ‘the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms (Ashcroft 63). It is a political approach to cultural ideology and governance that deconstructs the matrix of Enlightenment, Christian, and secular philosophies that frame modernity, racial hierarchy, and capitalist economics. For the purposes of this thesis, I most often apply the term “decoloniality,” which according to scholar Walter Mignolo, is the process of “delinking” or epistemic detachment from western eurocentric colonial knowledge systems. Delinking is an active and critical questioning of “structures of knowledge and subject formation (desires, beliefs, expectations) that were implanted in the colonies by the former colonizers.” This process proposes a paradigmatic shift of focus. Through a lens of decoloniality, western eurocentricity is a site of analysis rather than a ubiquitous frame of reference (Mignolo “A Conversation”).

My theoretical framework on decoloniality is also informed by Martiniquan psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. The inclusion of Fanon is a deliberate gesture to represent African and Black diasporic perspectives in discourses on decoloniality and Indigeneity. In his seminal text Black Skins, White Masks (1952), he uses psychoanalysis and phenomenology to propose the impact of racial formation on the psycho-social processes of colonized subjects. Fanon considers how “blackness” is symbolically linked to notions of inferiority. He argues that wearing the “white mask”—or performing colonial subjugation by adopting the colonizer’s language and customs—renders one complicit in their own subjugation (Fanon 14).

The grave psychopathological impacts of colonialism on colonized subjects leads Fanon to propose “decolonization,” a process he outlines in greater depth in his 1961
manifesto, *The Wretched of The Earth*. In this text, Fanon considers the role of language in the perpetuation of colonial psychopathology. According to Fanon, the hierarchy between the “colonizer” and the “colonized” is fabricated through binaristic terminology that projects the colonizer as civilized and morally superior, and the colonized as barbaric and morally abject (52). Fanon argues that this binaristic terminology is reified through the institutionalization of violence against colonized peoples. He proposes that decolonization is a process in which the “last shall be first,” or colonial hierarchy is inverted by the colonized peoples through violence (23). Following this insurrection, Fanon foresees the establishment of a new cultural vocabulary all together, one that is defined by the newly decolonized subjects.

Fanon’s conceptualization of a decolonized subject brings me to clarify why this thesis focuses on “decoloniality” rather than “post-colonization.” Like Fanon, I believe in the political implications of vocabulary, and find that the etymologies of the prefixes “post” and “de” signify opposing views of temporality. “Post” signifies the end, or after a time or sequence, which are concepts rooted in a western european Renaissance-era philosophy of time. “De,” on the other hand, signifies a removal, separation, and point of formation. According to Mignolo, “the ‘de’-indicates above all the need and the goal of the re-epistemic reconstitutions, re-emergence, resurgence, re-existence. That is, neither new nor post” (“Interview”). For these reasons, I believe that the prefix “de” is more critically engaged with the relationship between colonization and decoloniality, as well as in philosophies of space, temporality, and notions of “progress.”

Even though I agree with Mignolo’s theorization of the prefix “de,” I question the practice of colonial ideological “delinking” that both he and Fanon propose. To do so, I adopt a woman of color feminist analysis, most notably informed by Jasbir Puar’s essay, “I’d
Rather be a Cyborg Than a Goddess.” This scholarship wedges a necessary intervention in the application of intersectional theory and is critical to how I understand decoloniality as the negotiation of settler and Indigenous allegiances. Puar proposes that even as intersectional theory addresses the myriad modes through which women of color experience oppression, its application in feminist scholarship ironically reinscribes white women’s supremacy through the theorization of women of color as inherently “different.”

Developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectional theory visually analogizes how and why discrimination has detrimental juridical implications for black women, who she argues are prone to injury due to the “intersection” of racial and gender oppression (“Mapping the Margins”). The visualization of race and gender as fixed coordinates was and is instrumental in contemporary conceptualizations of identity politics. Crenshaw demonstrates that racism and sexism have very specific legal and societal outcomes for those located at these coordinates. While a helpful theoretical model for legal scholarship, Puar argues that intersectionality as it has been employed in feminist discourse reifies a practice of racialized and gendered essentialism, and renders gender and race as static rather than mutable formations. These critical interventions on identity formation inform how I theorize the rhizome, or the power network of settler colonial and Indigenous relations that I argue can inform how a decolonial curatorial practice can be conceived and applied.
Indigeneity

As defined by James Anaya in his text *Indigenous Peoples in International Law 3*, “Indigenous” refers to “the living descendants of pre-invasion inhabitants of lands now dominated by others” (3). “Indigeneity” qualifies one's cultural identification as part of an Indigenous community. This definition articulates the linkage between territoriality and cultural formation, and how the term itself came into being as a foil of colonial domination. Though Indigenous and Indigeneity are often used interchangeably, the qualitative intent of Indigeneity is of particular focus for this thesis.

In the essay, “The Problem with Indigeneity,” Ruben A. Arellano (Chicano-Mexika) traces the etymology of the term “Indigeneity” and problematizes how it has been used to homogenize identities, affirm stereotypes about Indigenous cultures, and as a result exclude those who do not neatly abide to the expectations that this definition commands. He specifically critiques why Indigeneity is often theorized as synonymous with the experiences of original inhabitants of the Americas. Because Indigeneity refers to the process of identity formation, Arellano proposes that it must be expansive rather than unidimensional in scope.

Because *Re(as)sisting Narratives* concerns colonization in South Africa, my definition of Indigeneity must include a theorization of Black subjectivities. In “Black Like Me”: Reframing Blackness for Decolonial Politics” George J. Sefa Dei reflects on the intellectual debates that propose tensions between Blackness and Indigeneity. By including “Africa(ness)” in theorizations of decoloniality, Dei encourages a “conscious intellectual shift” in how Black and African diasporic peoples are imbricated in settler colonial complicity, as they too, like Indigenous peoples of the Americas, face the destructive consequences of western european colonial conquest (122). He does not seek to
comparatively analyze who has more of a “right” to the term, but rather, warns against the ways Indigeneity has been used to delegitimize the critical role of Black radical politics in decolonial discourse (Dei 122). Through this intellectual re-reading, he proposes that Indigeneity be inclusive of racialized identities.

Arellano and Dei’s theorizations of Indigeneity add critical dimensionality to identity politics and encourage my analyses of the exhibitions to be considered through a prism of multiplicity. Both projects challenge the binaristic paradigm that renders settler coloniality and Indigeneity as discrete formations. In this thesis, I argue that the slipperiness of relation between settler colonialism and Indigeneity is evidenced in how curators both theorize and practice refusal in the context of exhibition making. I also propose that their understandings of Indigeneity and settler colonialism inform how they address the colonial etiology of curatorial practice, specifically through negotiation of vocabulary and material resources like space.
Language

Linda Tuhiwai Smith builds upon Fanon and Mignolo’s attention to decoloniality and language, specifically as it relates to the traditions of academic knowledge production. In “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,” Smith (Māori) presents critical insights about the role of research as a mechanism of colonial exploitation. The academy’s penchant for “discovery” and “truth,” she argues, reinforces violent colonial dichotomies in the guise of a “research” methodology (32).

Smith specifically focuses on the forced ubiquity of western european academic writing style and problematizes the privilege of the written word in academic research contexts (35). She argues that the ability to articulate ideas through writing is a colonial metric with which civility and rationality are measured. The imposition of this metric on Indigenous communities denigrates oral history and other non-textual knowledge forms (35). Decolonization, she argues, is a practice of critical engagement, specifically as it relates to the motivations and assumptions that substantiate writing and academic research in all its forms (20). As a writer and reader of the written word, and English in particular, Smith considers how the ubiquitous use of “we” and “us” generalizes a western eurocentric subjectivity that flattens the many perspectives that comprise Indigeneity (35).

In a decolonial research practice, Smith emphasizes that writers must resist binaristic and hierarchical terminology, or what philosopher Anne Schulherr Waters (Seminole) calls the “non discrete dualistic binary ontology” of the English language. In Language Matters: A Metaphysics On Non Discrete Binary Dualism, Waters states that western european colonial expansion violently imposed a binary logic system that positioned western eurocentricity as “civilized” and Indigeneity as “savage” (7). Binary dualism is inextricably linked to
Enlightenment-era notions of space and temporality, which I argue are the theoretical fulcrums of western eurocentric coloniality. Spatialized vocabulary in particular plays a key role in how colonization is theorized as political ideology and implemented as cultural norm (Smith 53). According to Enlightenment ontology, time and space are discrete resources that must annexed and relegated by human beings. Time is a metric that reflects the supposed progress or stasis of space, which is testament to how binary dualism impacts modes of visual and spatial perception.

Words like “line,” “center,” “inside,” and “outside” are spatialized vocabulary words integral to the western eurocentric colonial glossary. “Line,” Smith writes, is important to the colonial project of territorial mapping, as this mark is drawn to “survey land, to establish boundaries and to mark the limits of colonial power” (53). “Center” is synonymized in colonial ideologies with the top of the power hierarchy and the repository for the greatest concentration of resources. These words also rely on binary dualism as context clues to communicate value. White western eurocentricity is positioned as the ubiquitous “center” and non-white western eurocentric cultures are positioned on the “outside,” or in opposition to and alienated from the centralized power source. The line spatially demarcates the divisions among the center, inside, and outside, the superior and the inferior subject, and the colonizer and the colonized.

In this thesis, I challenge the use of spatialized vocabulary words like “center,” outside,” “inside,” and “line” when used to describe decoloniality. These words are applied with well-meaning intention to demonstrate the need for increased support of non-white, queer, non-cis male, and disabled artists. However, I bristle at application of these words because of their reification of binary dualism. Through the practice of “re-centering” and
“demarginalizing,” the notion of a ubiquitous center is maintained. Though these words attempt to problematize white-cis-heterocentric homogeneity, they still frame identities as a foil of white-cis-heterocentric homogeneity.

To propose that decolonial curatorial practice must exist outside of a settler colonial legacy stops short of unpacking the matrices of power that inform curatorial practice itself. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of the “rhizome” is helpful in parsing through how these matrices of power operate and are influenced by one another (1980). The rhizome is an “image of thought” that theorizes the social world as variable and context contingent rather than fixed. Connections among concepts, communities, and power are ceaseless and have no fixed point of origin (Deleuze and Guattari 17). This theory of mutable and relational social networks challenges the colonial spatial logic of the center versus the outside, in that it proposes systems of relation that are in perpetual web-like reconfiguration. In this thesis, I theorize Indigenous and settler colonial relations as rhizomatic, and consider how the use of spatialized vocabulary in curatorial writing articulates this relationship.

While I consider the metaphor of the rhizome as critical to my understanding of Indigenous and settler colonial relations, I also want to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the notion of mutability and power as unfixed can run the risk of erasing the very material and affective realities of colonial power. I do not intend to diffuse this fact through the application of the rhizome metaphor. Rather, I believe that the rhizome can help us consider how power subversively operates in the context of such stark inequity. In proposing mutability and reconfiguration, I envision means of relation that are more nuanced than a capitulation to white supremacy. This thesis zooms in on curatorial decision making, and
how this process is a deft navigation of refusal, accountability, and compromise that can transmute the colonial hierarchical paradigm.

Though spatialized vocabulary can be used to expose the rhizomatic formation of space, identity, and power, it is critical to consider the limitations of written language—and particular, spatialized metaphor—in the actualization of decoloniality. Tuck and Yang’s “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” considers the metaphorical use of “decolonization” in social justice movements. For example, the phrase “decolonize our school system” has been employed in activist contexts to demand a delinking (to borrow from Mignolo) from western eurocentric pedagogical systems. Though Tuck and Yang affirm the connectivity among social justice movements, they propose that the use of “decolonial” to articulate this connectivity erases the key goal of decoloniality: Indigenous land and cultural repatriation. This reinscription of colonial violence, or what they term, “settler moves toward innocence” “attempts to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (1). In this thesis, I propose that the curator-authored texts of Drawing Lines and Re(as)sisting Narratives use spatialized vocabulary in ways that reveal negotiations of settler complicity and accountability.

Critical to my analysis of spatialized metaphor is an acknowledgment of how space and territory are theorized through an Indigenous studies lens. In narratives about western european colonial conquest of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia, it is often proposed that these non-western societies did not have conceptions of property ownership similar to that of western europeans. This cultural disjunction thus resulted in the inability for non-western european societies to “understand” the dimensions of their subjection and the terms of territorial dispossession (Dannenmaier 78). As I share in the preceding pages, it is true that
the concepts of territorial ownership and possession of natural resources are culturally specific to western European Enlightenment philosophy. However, I do resist the narrative that Indigenous populations had or have no understanding of territory or intimate relationships rooted to land.

Landmark federal cases like *Johnson versus McIntosh* (1823) demonstrate how Lockeian conceptions of property ownership were used to justify the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral homelands, a policy also referred to as “homesteading” (Robertson 4). Homesteading was used to invalidate Indigenous epistemologies of land. It has been applied in contemporary cultural discourses in debates about “art-washing,” or a real-estate development strategy that promotes gentrification through support of contemporary art economies (Grodach 4). In this thesis, my understanding of decoloniality is informed by such multifarious conceptualizations of “territory” as both an ideology and material resource.
Exhibition

This thesis positions the “exhibition” as a colonial apparatus buttressed by western eurocentric Enlightenment philosophies of space and time. Exhibitions began as a kind of public relations strategy in the late 1800s on the part of the colonial empires in Britain, France, and Germany. Known at the time as “world exhibitions,” or “world fairs,” these large scale and often touring public programs were widely attended, and showcased a variety of objects and ephemera from colonized regions in Asia, Africa, and the Americas (Burris 2). Artwork, architecture, crops, plants, animals, and human subjects were displayed in these convention-like settings to demonstrate the “exotic” natural resource richness of these newly annexed territories. Not only were exhibitions intended to promote trade among European nations, but they were also a strategy to garner civilian investment in colonial conquest.

Exhibitions were critical to establishing the concept of “otherization,” as they helped european political powers establish a fissure between the objectifier and the objectified. Recontextualized in spaces far removed from their original locations, human subjects and ephemera became primary source material for scientific and anthropological inquiry. Through “acquisition” (a euphemism for theft), as well as controlled circulation of bodies and objects, exhibitions became key sites at which western european colonial powers developed and showcased hegemonic notions of “reality” for national and international consumption (Bloembergen, 15). They supposedly proved, through the practice of display and categorization, that western eurocentric political and cultural infrastructures were superior to those of their “conquests.”

The “exhibitionary complex” (Bennett, 1988), therefore, can be understood not only as a form of nation building, but also as a proclamation of socio-economic and political
supremacy. Exhibitions were positioned as neutral, uncontestably factual sites wherein power was literally materialized (Bennett 82). John Lehning proposes that the “exhibition” is a colonial technology, an information repository that crafts national identity, justifies empire building, and promotes understandings of “self” as citizen through objectification of the “other” (Lehning 240). The influence of Enlightenment philosophy, which privileged notions of rationality and reason, laid the groundwork for a more permanent institutional model of the exhibition, which came to be known as the museum. As a result, the late eighteenth century ushered in the founding of two of western Europe’s most renowned cultural institutions, the British Museum in London in 1759 and the Louvre, in Paris in 1793 (Watson 99).

The lineage of the museum is entwined with that of the contemporary art gallery, in that both sites are similarly invested in neutrality and objectivity (O’Doherty, 1976). Brian O’Doherty’s essay, “Inside The White Cube” proposes that the white walled gallery (that has arguably become the modus operandi for exhibition design in most museums) is not a neutral, ahistorical, and atemporal space, but a modernist project that is inextricably linked to global economics (79). O’Doherty proposes that the white walled gallery is an aestheticized spatial context that is as much artistic content as are the works on display. He compares the white cube to a tomb or treasury, as both sites are imagined containers of atemporality and monetary value (7). In these contexts, containment equates everlasting value, which is privileged in a capitalist society. Like tombs and treasures, galleries and museums are sacrosanct sites that produce surplus value. In the necessity to protect this surplus value, a theoretical line is thus drawn between what remains “inside” for display and what is relegated to the “outside.”
This thesis considers how exhibition design can be a political tool when considered through a decolonial framework. While *Drawing Lines* and *Re(as)sisting Narratives* engage in many conventional installation practices, each exhibition takes divergent strategies with regards to temporality, space, and accumulation. *Drawing Lines* is situated in Montreal’s SBC Gallery for the duration of 2017, though different forms of project have been presented in various locations across Canada and abroad since 2011. *Re(as)sisting Narratives* is presented concurrently in both the Netherlands and South Africa. While this roving exhibition model echoes the traveling colonial exhibition of the eighteenth century, I frame the itinerant nature of these exhibitions as resisting the tradition of acquisition. Another facet of exhibition design I consider is that of duration. The Wood Land School facilitators decide to present their exhibition in a series of “gestures,” which manifests in the gradual accumulation and installation of art works for one year, while the *Re(as)sisting Narratives* curator Chandra Frank adheres to a three-month timeframe. These strategies provide different conceptualizations of “situatedness,” which I define as critical engagement with how curatorial practice is politically and personally rooted.
Curator

In this thesis, I consider curatorial practice as an accumulation of performative acts that expresses one’s subjectivity. Within the context of work that aligns itself with decolonial politics, I argue that it is absolutely critical for curatorial practitioners to acknowledge the colonial underpinnings of their profession and to consider how their work calls for them to negotiate complicity and resistance.

The etymology of the word “curate” is Latin “for one who cares, from cūrāre to care for, from cūra care” (“Curator”). This origin represents the museum’s historical role as a site of value of which curators are expected to protect and build. From the inception of the colonial exhibition in the late 1800s, curators have been instrumental in the construction of the colonized “Other” through their roles as purveyors of taste, historical relevance, and aesthetic value. The etymological intent of “curate” as the practice of “care” is directly linked to the maintenance of colonial governmentality. The practice of care in curating is also reflective of a dedication to imperial nationalism, as the presentation of spoils from territorial seizure was and is employed as a propagandist tool to justify colonization.

The possibilities of curator as political dissident propel my research for this thesis. In an article adapted from Maura Reilly’s forthcoming book, Curatorial Activism: Towards An Ethics of Curating, Reilly considers the responsibilities of curators to “[ensure] that the under– or un–represented, the silenced, and/or the ‘doubly colonized’, are no longer ignored... exclusively to visual culture in/from the margins” (“What Is Curatorial Activism?”). The articulation of these political imperatives through exhibition making is what Reilly refers to as a “curatorial corrective.” While I take issue with the phrase, “in/from the margins,” I find the strength in her argument to be that curators must implicate their
subjectivity and be critically reflective of their cultural biases. In my analyses of *Drawing Lines* and *Re(as)sisting Narratives*, I am concerned with how decolonial politics are articulated by curators in their writing and their choices of particular artworks. I consider the limitations of spatialized metaphor in descriptions of how such ethics are operationalized, and how decolonial curatorial practice is entangled within and informed by a settler colonial context.

Because I mention the role of taxonomy and categorization in the colonial foundation of museums, I am particularly sensitive to the role of a “glossary” in this thesis. Each of the terms outlined in this section have a wide range of theoretical influences which necessitates a literature review so that the reader is aware of the sources informing my definitions of the terms. Like all definitions, however, there are omissions and facets of theoretical inquiry that are unrepresented. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I engage interpretations of terminology that are less definitive and hold space for instability and at times, contradiction. I envision the terms outlined in this chapter to be like a scaffolding, that, while serving as a kind of foundation for Chapter 2, can be disassembled and reassembled to serve a variety of applications.
Chapter 2- Unknowing One’s Power

I utilize the historical and theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review to ground my comparative analyses of texts authored by Drawing Lines facilitators Duane Linklater, Tanya Lukin Linklater, cheyenne turions, and Walter Scott and Re(as)sisting Narratives lead curator Chandra Frank. Similar to the literature review, this chapter is organized into subsections, each of which is titled after a concept that frames an entry point of inquiry. Each subsection considers how the exhibitions address decoloniality by way of their engagement with the subsection concept. Through this comparative analysis, I propose that decoloniality—and by extension, decolonial curatorial practice—comprises a rhizomatic network of power relations and systems of accountability between Indigenous and settler communities. It is a process whereby curators must negotiate this network towards the stewardship of resources for Indigenous and Black initiated artistic practices.
“Curator” versus “Facilitator”

This subsection considers how the term “curator” is applied conceptually and pragmatically in both Drawing Lines and Re(as)sisting Narratives. Considerations around authorship, purveyance of “taste,” and the practice of care yield different perspectives on whether the curators choose to self-identify as “curators.” The claim to or rejection of this term provides insight into how decoloniality operates along a spectrum of refusal.

In published interviews about Drawing Lines, Duane Linklater, Tanya Lukin Linklater, cheyanne turions, and Walter Scott adamantly refuse the title of curator and instead refer to themselves and SBC employees as project “facilitators.” In an October 2017 Art in America interview, Duane Linklater explains this subject position:

From the beginning, we have aimed to create conditions and spaces for ourselves as Indigenous people and Indigenous artists. I don’t see Wood Land School as a curatorial gesture, but as a project driven by artists. Each iteration is different in geography and tone. We address specific concerns in each space. (“Taking Up Space”)

Though they organize exhibitions, the Wood Land School identifies as artists first and foremost, whose practice is site-responsive. The decision to critically distance from a curator title is a performance of refusal against colonial hierarchy and the Enlightenment value placed on individualism. By calling themselves artist-organizers or “facilitators,” the Wood Land School privileges a collaborative working model. Authorship is not anchored to one person, but rather, is laterally dispersed.
The title “facilitator” aligns the role to concepts of opacity and irreducibility. Edouard Glissant argues that opacity is a key operation of decolonial resistance, as it counters the western eurocentric colonial tradition of taxonomy and essentialism (191). By calling themselves facilitators, the Wood Land School team asserts that the transmission of knowledge is iterative and cyclical rather than hierarchical and absolute. Authorship is the accumulation of human and non-human perspectives for which the Wood Land School is a channel, not the authority.

For the duration of Drawing Lines at SBC, the Wood Land School facilitators requested the gallery change its name from SBC to the “Wood Land School.” This request was reflected in a removal of the SBC name both on the gallery’s website and on the vinyl lettering at the gallery’s entrance (Figure 1). This decision addresses how authorship is also negotiated within the gallery administrator and artist-curator relationship, given the colonial legacies of galleries and educational institutions. The name “Wood Land School,” according to a Duane Linklater, refers to the Canadian artist collective Professional Indian Artists Inc., who were known publicly as the “Woodland School.” By breaking apart “Woodland” into two separate words, Linklater states in a September 2017 Contemporary And interview he “sought to break apart the ethnographic categorization of eastern indigenous people in North America” (“Centering Indigenous Bodies”). He also points out that the word “School” is fraught with trauma for Indigenous communities, due to the history of the residential school system in the United States and Canada. The name change from SBC to “Wood Land School” reinforces that the project is part a lineage of other Indigenous-led artist collaboratives invested in artistic practice as a political and pedagogical tool. Rooted in the provocation, “what does it mean for a settler-colonial institution to unknow its power?”
SBC’s name change represents how galleries, through acts like renaming, can rescind their visibility for the purposes of Indigenous-led artistic practices.

Chandra Frank, on the other hand, is clear in her self-identification as a professional curator and in *Re(as)sisting Narratives* as an exhibition developed as a result of her research into the potentiality of the “archive.” As a queer woman of color and self-identified “lead curator” of this exhibition, Frank’s claim to individual authorship can be interpreted...
subversively. In an essay written by Frank entitled, “Policy Briefing: Towards a Decolonial Curatorial Practice,” she proposes that curatorial practice can incorporate “alternative epistemologies” in order to represent “forgotten histories, contested legacies and silenced memories.” By situating herself as the lead divisor of this project, Frank demonstrates that the subjectivity of an author undoubtedly defines what becomes history, how those narratives are constructed, and how the exhibition is used as a pedagogical tool to disseminate such narratives. Even though Frank clearly articulates her curatorial leadership as a political stance, she also writes of exhibition making as a process whereby she considers “how inclusion is defined and assessed.” As such, she refers to the *Re(as)sisting Narratives* host galleries and artists as “equal partners” (“Policy Briefing”). Given the historical exclusion of women of color in curatorial leadership positions, Frank’s adoption of the lead curator title, as well as her assertion of equal partnership, strategically undermines the colonial, white western eurocentric supremacist legacy of the profession and its stakeholders.

Such variant perspectives on the application of “curator” point to the political potency of the term itself. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* by Paul O’Neill charts the shifting role of the curator from caretaker of objects to that of an author, political agent, and creative practitioner. In this historical survey, which he begins in the 1920s and concludes at rise of the biennial format of the 1990s, he proposes that curatorial authorship became such due to the waning belief of the “autonomy of the art object.” Artists thus looked to curators to support this paradigmatic shift by encouraging them to engage ideas in public forums, as well as to integrate politically radical approaches to exhibition design and scholarship: “curatorship emerged as a creative, semiautonomous, and individually authored form of mediation” (O’Neill, *Culture of Curating* 4). Individualism therefore became an
important facet of curatorial practice which is a value informed by Enlightenment philosophy of the “genius” and western eurocentric colonial ideologies about territorial conquest (Delon 581).

O'Neill is critical of curatorial individualism and how the exhibitionary complex constructs meaning. In resistance, he suggests that curatorial practice be collaborative and that curators be held accountable by artists for their decisions. By calling themselves facilitators, the Wood Land School inverts the traditionally hierarchical relationship between artist and curator in favor of a hybrid role. They highlight the role of curator as negotiator of resources, and in this way, demonstrate how Indigenous artists can strategically maneuver affiliations with settler institutions. In Drawing Lines, these maneuvers are evidenced in two key ways: the first being SBC’s year-long name change to the Wood Land School, and the second being that the Wood Land School facilitators were endowed complete discretionary control of the project budget. In the context of this project, access to capital directly informs one’s claim to curatorial authorship.

Even as Chandra Frank identifies herself as “lead curator” of Re(as)sisting Narratives, she also expresses skepticism around the hierarchical power structures in the contemporary art world. She is critical of the exhibitionary complex but believes in its subversive potential to “(unearth) hidden histories.” “Hidden histories” is defined in the Re(as)sisting Narratives curatorial statement as the “lingering legacies of colonialism between South Africa and the Netherlands” ("Exhibit: Re(as)sisting Narratives"). This unearthing process requires that institutions, artists, and curators be mutually invested in “decolonial aesthetics,” or the dismantlement of western eurocentric “normative paradigms.” According to Frank, mutuality and partnership among institutions, artists, and curators is
only possible through “instructive policies that provide structural modes of accountability for the artistic process” (“Policy Briefing”). Though Frank expresses her support for lateral power dispersal in the contemporary art world, it remains unclear how she suggests structures should be implemented, and what the particular role of the curator should be in the development and application of such structures. The contradictory nature of Frank’s support for both individual authorship and non-hierarchical collaboration among artists, curators, and settler institutions points to the nature of power itself as unstable, context-contingent, and rhizomatic.

Given the fraught legacy of curatorial practice as rooted in the individualism, the arbitration of taste, and promotion of aesthetic hierarchy, considerations around curatorial authorship are key to how Drawing Lines and Re(as)sisting Narratives express their working definitions of decoloniality. Both projects oscillate between support of leadership and collectivization: the Wood Land School facilitators negotiate their belief in Indigenous leadership and dispersal of authorship amongst the collective, and Frank stands firm in her self-identification as “lead curator” while also encouraging collaboration among artists and institutions. Even though these projects share similar perspectives on how curatorial authorship navigates decoloniality, they differ in how transparent the respective curators are in sharing specific pragmatic approaches.

By repudiating the curatorial title, the Wood Land School facilitators address Tuck and Yang’s argument that decolonization should not be used metaphorically unless in the context of land repatriation. In changing the name of SBC to the Wood Land School, assuming leadership of the gallery’s daily operations over the course of the year, and independently managing the project’s finances, the Wood Land School facilitators make
infrastructural maneuvers that prove the possibility of a settler colonial institution to “unknow its power” and forsake its control of resources (like physical space and money) towards the support of Indigenous-led governance and artistic practices. Frank’s positionality as a lead curator who values equal partnership is reflected in her decision to program the exhibition in both the Netherlands and South Africa. However, her pragmatic approaches to decoloniality and authorship are not as clear. In her writing on Re(as)asisting Narratives, “decolonial” is often employed metaphorically and without an articulation of process. Even though these projects exhibit nuanced differences in how they reclaim or refuse the term “curator,” both are similarly situated in settler-colonial gallery contexts. Such quagmires prove that decoloniality is not a process whereby societies successfully transition to a “pre-colonial” point of origin. Rather, it is a process through which settler and Indigenous societies leverage their interdependence towards political, social, and economic equity.
Exhibition versus Gesture

Drawing Lines is described by its facilitators as an exhibition that “unfolds” in a series of four discrete “gestures” or “clusters of activity that bring works into and out of the gallery space—such that the exhibition is in a constant state of becoming” (Linklater et al). The word choice of “gesture” is performative because it refers to the signification of meaning through actions by the body. This conceptual linkage to corporeality grounds the term in personal subjectivity, which poses friction to the supposed objective authority of the exhibitionary complex. A key conceptual strategy of the colonial museum model is a claim of objective truth, as the exhibition was founded as a nationalist project aimed to garner support for imperial conquest. The decision of the Wood Land School facilitators to describe their work as “gestural” challenges the ideology of the exhibitionary complex as an apolitical, atemporal site uninformed by subjectivities. Through gesture, authorship is not deterministic but mutates through time and interpersonal contact. Concepts are not static but iterative. This shiftiness and instability echoes Glissant’s theorizations of opacity and Audra Simpson’s (Mohawk) inquiry into the ways Indigenous communities strategically circumvent colonial anthropological research traditions to undermine how “truth” is derived.

In the first paragraph of curatorial text for Re(as)sisting Narratives, Frank positions the project as a “multi-media group exhibition” that “[evokes] and [readdresses] that [which] is left behind, that what is (in)visible, and a visual fusion of reality and fantasy to create new ways of being” ("Re(as)sisting Narratives"). The exhibition is presented as the vessel through which a revisionist history is propagated. Frank’s opening paragraph destabilizes the role of the exhibition as a ubiquitous truth teller by stating that the artworks on view are a “visual fusion of reality and fantasy.” As Bennett writes in “The Exhibitionary Complex,”
exhibitions utilize the practice of “display” to present a cultural narrative of “truth” in order to justify political and economic supremacy (428). By writing that her exhibition is a provocation of reality and fantasy, Frank destabilizes the supposed objectivity that defines museum exhibition culture and demonstrates how curatorial practice actively participates in historical narrativization.

In her essay, “Policy Briefing: Towards a Decolonial Curatorial Practice,” Frank proposes that *Re(as)sisting Narratives* utilizes the exhibitionary complex as a means to privilege “alternative epistemologies,” and that “decolonial curatorial process is committed to undoing coloniality that is embedded in the existence of the Western museum space [by disrupting] power dynamics that lie beneath the development of exhibition making.” In her efforts to engage the exhibitionary complex in the project of decoloniality, Frank leans into the potential for this system to initiate its own unraveling. As the lead curator, she positions herself as the shepherd of this unraveling process through her selection of artists. By inviting Black South African artists to participate in the exhibition, Frank challenges the colonial legacy of exclusion that identifies the objectifier and objectified along racialized lines.

Frank’s curatorial decision to include the work of the Cape Town-based collective The Burning Museum Arts Collective is a critique of how the exhibitionary complex defines “high” and “low” art. *Onthou djy nog*, which is part of the series *Straatpraatj(i)es: Remember to Onthou* (2016), is a portrait of two South African youths, overlaid with text from the 1913 Natives Lands Act, which denied Black South Africans of land leasing and ownership and relegated them to reserves (Beinart and Delius 668). The work is installed outdoors as a wheatpasted poster in Transvaalbuurt, a neighborhood in east Amsterdam that is named after Transvaal, the nineteenth century Dutch-ruled province in South Africa (Fig.
2). By installing this work in an outdoor location that so literally exposes the contemporary presence of coloniality, Frank extends the territorial bounds of an “appropriate” exhibition space from the privatized gallery to the streets of Amsterdam. This curatorial decision about artwork installation addresses decoloniality through the repatriation of public space. The Burning Museum Arts Collective uses digital collage techniques to layer archival material, which mirrors the practice of layering that is essential to the wheatpasting process. Layering is also a metaphor for how the romanticization of Dutch colonialism in South Africa is superimposed onto the Amsterdam’s urban fabric, as Transvaalbuurt is a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood in the city.
Fig. 2. A public intervention in the Transvaalbuurt in Amsterdam East as part of the exhibition *Re(as)sisting Narratives* curated by Chandra Frank at Framer Framed. *Burning Museum Arts Collective*, 2016, www.burningmuseum.wordpress.com/2016/09/29/straatpraatjies-onthou-day-nog/
The inclusion of *Onthou djiy nog* challenges colonial aesthetic hierarchies that have historically dictated what is appropriate for inclusion in a museum context. Though criminalized as vandalism, public visual art practices like graffiti and wheatpasting have rich histories as modes of political messaging in South Africa’s Apartheid resistance. Frank’s inclusion of this public art work necessarily incorporates such subversive material strategies into art historical discourses and helps direct settler institutional resources to these practices so that they can be more robustly supported. However, even though the work is installed outdoors in public space, it is part of a project associated with a contemporary art gallery (Figure 3). With such a professionalized affiliation, a dissident artistic practice like wheatpasting garners “credible” visibility and protection from government penalization. This shift in protection points to the rhizomatic nature of decoloniality, in that *Onthou djiy nog* is both resistant and adjacent to settler colonial power systems. In other words, settler coloniality is not tethered to the gallery, but also extends outwards into public space and determines one’s access to space as a civic right and resource.
Both *Drawing Lines* and *Re(as)sisting Narratives* are in one way or another vested in the potential of contemporary artistic practice to operate within decolonial politics. However, the differences in these projects rest in how each curator negotiates refusal of terms associated with the exhibitionary complex. While the Wood Land School facilitators avoid over-identification with the use of “exhibition” in favor of “gesture,” Frank reclaims “exhibition” and its potential to undermine the hierarchical aesthetic values and traditions of exclusion. Despite these ideological differences, both projects are still situated within the contemporary art world and within the territorial bounds of settler owned contemporary art galleries. This matrix of power negotiation brings to mind the adage of Black feminist theorist Audre Lorde, “for the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Can decoloniality be achieved by utilizing the same systems founded to justify colonial conquest?
In both *Drawing Lines* and *Re(as)sisting Narratives*, settler-owned and operated contemporary art galleries are the sites at which practices of Indigenous sovereignty take shape. I do not find this relationship to be wholly complicit in coloniality or contradictory to the goals of decoloniality. Rather, I interpret this paradox as representative of a rhizomatic network of relation that implicates settlers and Indigenous communities in decolonial processes. The projects are made possible through an investment in the resources of the exhibitionary complex (such as space and capital) and the intentional redistribution of such resources on behalf of the settler class to Indigenous-led artistic practices.
Multilingualism

One of the strategies implemented in western eurocentric colonial governance is language restriction. Indigenous languages of colonized regions have faced centuries of criminalization by colonial powers, so as to enforce cultural dominance and promote the erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems. In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon writes extensively about the detrimental impact of this erasure, stating that French is a “cultural tool” imposed on Black people in the Antilles to more deeply steep them into the French colonial political regime. Mastery of colonial languages is also associated with class and educational privilege, as well as proximity to white privilege. Fanon argues that such language acquisition further alienates Black people from the decolonization process (38). In resistance, he proposes that colonized peoples should commit themselves to language repatriation with the same vigor as land repatriation.

Language erasure is also referred to as “linguistic imperialism,” or the phenomenon coined by Robert Phillipson about the global imposition of the English language. Phillipson shares how the dissemination of English since the 18th century mirrors the political and economic agendas of English speaking nations in the colonization of non-English speaking nations (53). The mandate for monolingualism is addressed in *Drawing Lines* and *Re(as)sisting Narratives* through digital media. When on the Wood Land School website, visitors are able to access the exhibition statement in three different languages: English, French, and Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk), which is the language of First Nation of Kahnawá:ke (also called Montreal, Quebec, which is where *Drawing Lines* is presented) (Figures 4, 5, and 6). The *Re(as)sisting Narrative* curatorial statement only appears on the Framer Framed website and not District Six Museum’s website. The official language of the Netherlands is
Dutch and the Framer Framed website provides translation of all exhibition-related web copy in both Dutch and English (Figure 7). Curatorial considerations regarding monolingualism, multilingualism and translation speak to the historical dimensions of linguistic imperialism in Canada, the Netherlands, and South Africa respectively. Both projects negotiate multilingualism in ways that complicate ideas around nationalism and cultural authenticity.

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Wood Land School:

*Kahatenhstánion tsi na'tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha*  
*Drawing Lines from January to December*

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For the duration of 2017, SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art will be renamed and operate as Wood Land School. An itinerant project first instigated by Duane Linklater, this instance of Wood Land School is organized by Duane Linklater, Tanya Lukin Linklater and cheyanne turions, with Walter Scott.

Wood Land School: *Kahatenhstánion tsi na'tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December* is conceived as a single year-long exhibition that will unfold through a series of gestures—clusters of activity that bring works into and out of the gallery space—such that the exhibition is in a constant state of becoming. *Kahatenhstánion tsi na'tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December* recognizes the power of line to mark history and invoke memory, proposing lines without beginning or end as a way to imagine Indigenous futurity.

This project is the continuation of a conversation and it is the forging of new relationships. From an initial position of Indigenous self-determination and collectivity, we situate ourselves as impacted upon by forces both nurturing and destructive; we work to be aware of our own participation in dispossession; and we consider our capacity to articulate new ways of being in relation.

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Gestures
- First Gesture
- Second Gesture
- Third Gesture
- Fourth Gesture

Publications
- Annie Pootoogook Obituary by Heather Igloliorte
- Untitled Letter by Brian Jungen

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Fig. 4. Screenshot of English-translated webpage for *Wood Land School: Kahatenhstánion tsi na’tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December, First Gesture*. SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal, 2017, https://www.sbcgallery.ca/wood-land-school-gestures-c19i2
Wood Land School:
*Kahatenhstánion tsi na’tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Traçant des lignes de janvier à décembre*

Pour la durée de l’année 2017, SBC galerie d’art contemporain sera renommée Wood Land School et opérra comme telle. Wood Land School est un projet itinérant initié par Duane Linklater et dont cette itération est organisée par Duane Linklater, Tanya Lukin Linklater et cheyanne turions, avec Walter Scott.

Wood Land School : *Kahatenhstánion tsi na’tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Traçant des lignes de janvier à décembre* est conçue comme une exposition d’une durée d’un an qui se déploie à travers une série de gestes – un ensemble d’activités qui font entrer et sortir des œuvres de l’espace de la galerie – de sorte que l’exposition est constamment en état de devenir. *Kahatenhstánion tsi na’tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Traçant des lignes de janvier à décembre* reconnaît le pouvoir de la ligne, celui de marquer l’histoire et d’invoquer la mémoire, proposant des lignes sans début ni fin lesquelles agiront comme moyen(s) d’imaginer la futurité Autochtone.

Ce projet est la continuation d’une conversation, c’est aussi l’élaboration de nouvelles relations. Partant d’une position initiale d’autodétermination et de collectivité Autochtone, nous nous aimons comme abîmant l’impact de forces à la fois promissantes et...

Fig. 5. Screenshot of French-translated webpage for *Wood Land School: Kahatenhstánion tsi na’tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December, First Gesture*. SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal, 2017, www.sbcgallery.ca/wood-land-school-fr
Wood Land School: *Kahatenhstánion tsi na’tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha*

Fig. 6. Mohawk-translated webpage for *Wood Land School: Kahatenhstánion tsi na’tetiatere ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December, First Gesture*, SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal, 2017, www.sbcgallery.ca/wood-land-school-moh
Exhibition:
Re(as)sisting Narratives

Framer Framed presents a unique collaborative exhibition titled Re(as)sisting Narratives, curated by Chandra Frank. The exhibition explores lingering legacies of colonialism between South Africa and the Netherlands through engaging with contemporary artists from both countries. The exhibition is on view at Framer Framed in Amsterdam from 28 August – 27 November 2016 and at District Six Museum Homecoming Centre in Cape Town from November 23 – December 13 2016. More on the exhibition at District Six Museum.

Re(as)sisting Narratives is a result of a two-year project with South African based partners: District Six Museum and Centre for Curating the Archive. Participating artists include:...
In the *Canadian Art* article, “Inside a Year-Long Experiment in Indigenous Institutional Critique,” co-authored by the Wood Land School and John Hampton, Wood Land School facilitator Duane Linklater says that, “The language, up to this point, has been a struggle—to find language that describes what we are doing. To me, that signifies that there is a failure of language to encapsulate what we are doing.” The decision to have all website copy translated into English, French, and Mohawk potentially addresses this failure of language by resisting anglicization. The imposition of English in Canada has disproportionately impacted First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, as well as French speakers. These populations were federally banned—with different degrees of severity—from speaking their native languages in favor of English (Prodonovic).
The presence multilingualism on the Wood Land School website reflects the lateral organizational model of the project, which is Indigenous-led and supported by resources procured by a settler-identified contemporary art gallery. The Wood Land School facilitators are clear in their exhibition statement that *Drawing Lines* is founded on “centering indigeneity” or “primary relationships [that] are Indigenous to Indigenous, which includes land and non-humans” (turions). However, they also acknowledge the importance of Indigenous and settler partnerships, “so as not to exclude anyone interested in engaging with the complexities of the aforementioned issues” (“A Symposium”).

The tenant of Indigenous and non-Indigenous solidarity is expressed in the facilitators’ decision to include Mohawk, English, and French in all project-related writing. Though the implications of this entanglement are seemingly paradoxical, and the facilitators utilize multilingualism to point to the political potentiality of this entanglement:

> From an initial position of Indigenous self-determination and collectivity, we situate ourselves as impacted upon by forces both nurturing and destructive; we work to be aware of our own participation in dispossession; and we consider our capacity to articulate new ways of being in relation. (Linklater et al).

While multilingualism challenges the linguistic imperialism of English and other western european languages, it also points to the role of translation in both dispossession and alternative relational strategies. Because language and meaning is so context driven and culturally specific, translation does not have a one-to-one relationship with intended meaning. Rather, translation is an approximation that straddles clarity and opacity. Translation is an apt analogy for how cultural meaning circulates through language. Words like “ownership,” for example, do not have an etymological basis in many First Nations
languages, but can be traced to a western eurocentric cultural context (Noble 467). Even still, the concept of ownership has inevitably informed discourses of Indigenous political sovereignty and cultural repatriation. Through multilingualism, the Wood Land School facilitators articulate “new ways of being in relation” through the acknowledgment of adjacency to settler cultural formations.

*Drawing Lines* includes several artworks that consider the role of language in Indigenous cultural repatriation. (*ēkāwiya nēpēwis*) (2017) by Joi Arcand (Muskeg Lake Cree Nation) exposes the layers of signification embedded in written language, and how the form is used as a metric for cultural authenticity. The work is a pink neon channel sign comprised of Cree syllables that is installed in the second gesture of *Drawing Lines* (Figure 9). The ebullience of the neon reflects off of all facets of the other works on display. This visual effect mirrors the pervasiveness of written language as a communication tool (Figures 10 and 11). Arcand’s work is grounded in the revitalization of the Cree language and seeks to illuminate the necessity for the preservation and application of First Nations languages.

The sculpture’s text is not translated into English or French on any didactics, a choice by Arcand that is honored by the Wood Land School facilitators. This decision both asserts Indigenous self-determination while complicating how meaning is derived: "Sometimes I don't provide translations because I don't necessarily want that immediate satisfaction of being given the right answer," Arcand says. "I like to challenge viewers to look up what it means and maybe even learn a bit of the language on their own" (Arcand, “In Huge Neon”). Opacity, in the context of this work, is a relational phenomenon: settler viewers are positioned as outsiders for their inability to understand the symbols, while for Cree peoples and others who can read the language, the message is brightly illuminated. For those Cree-
identified peoples who do not understand the symbols, the sculpture represents the consequences of linguistic imperialism on cultural identity formation. It unsettles the notion that one must speak one’s ancestral language in order to authentically “belong.” The resistance to translation represents an approach to decoloniality that is informed by liminality rather than by de-linking.

Fig. 10. Installation view of Joi Arcand, (ēkāwiya nēpēwisi), Neon channel sign (pink). Wood Land School / SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal, 2017. www.sbcgallery.ca/wood-land-school-gestures-c19i2?lightbox=i41uqx
With the inclusion of Arcand’s work, the Wood Land School facilitators expose the theoretical tension that undergirds decoloniality. Indigeneity is a concept that is born out of necessity to define a non-white, non-colonial subject position. It should not, therefore, be used to codify Indigenous cultural authenticity. In other words, a Cree person’s ability or inability to understand Arcand’s sign does not bear judgment on their identification as Indigenous. However, the inclusion of this work suggests that curation can be a tool with which to embrace multiplicity as opposed to essentialism.

In Re(as)sisting Narratives, the presence of multilingualism—in particular, the translation of Frank’s exhibition text into English and Dutch—demonstrates how linguistic
imperialism shapes political and cultural formations. Dutch settlers (known as Boers) and the British battled one another ruthlessly for control of the southern cape in the South African Boer War (1899-1902) (“First Anglo Boer War”). In 1910 following the tumultuous transition of power from the Dutch to the British, Dutch and English became the first “official” languages of South Africa. By 1925, however, Dutch was removed as an official language and was replaced by Afrikaans, a creolized language developed by Dutch South African colonists that is comprised of Germanic, Malay, Khoisan, and Bantu influences (Niesler 459). Even though Afrikaans is a meld of linguistic influences, the dominant association with this language is in its cultural and political affiliations to the Apartheid regime. Afrikaner nationalism was the white supremacist separatist movement that legally mandated subjugation of Indigenous people in South Africa, and Afrikaans was the language spoken by its proponents.

While the global dominance of English is the subject of warranted critique, the language has played a critical role in decolonization strategies initiated by Black South Africans. During the Apartheid regime, Afrikaans was legally mandated for school instruction, even though the language faced significant resistance by the Black population. In 1976, Black school children in Soweto protested the Afrikaans language mandate and instead demanded English language instruction. The student activists believed that the anti-Black Bantu education policy was a strategy to disempower Black people from engaging in and having access to political allegiances outside of Afrikaner-dominated South Africa. With “liberation before education” as the unifying rallying cry, this youth-led action of twenty thousand students was met with ferocious retaliation by South African police in what is now
called the “Soweto Uprising.” This uprising is identified as the precipitator of nation-wide mobilization against the Apartheid regime.

Given this charged history with English, its presence in *Re(as)sisting Narratives* written materials takes on a politically nuanced dimension specific to the colonial history of South Africa. On the Framer Framed gallery website, visitors can toggle between reading text in either English or Dutch (Figure 7 and 8). Because Frank’s curatorial imperative is to examine the “lingering legacies of colonialism between South Africa and the Netherlands,” the role of English as the primary language of her curatorial writing can be interpreted as a historically referential decision. When considered in the context of the Soweto Uprising, English plays a critical role in Black South African decolonization efforts. Frank’s use of English can be theorized as an act of solidarity with the “Liberation before Education” movement, even as the dissemination of English as a “global” language promotes a kind of colonial cultural ubiquity. In this context, settler colonial cultural production like English works in allegiance with decoloniality.

The Dutch translation of the *Re(as)sisting Narratives* curatorial text is a historical linguistic reminder that Afrikaans is the “daughter language” of Dutch, as its vocabulary and grammatical structure is informed by the seventeenth century Dutch spoken by colonists on the southern cape (Willemyns 197). Though Frank does not explicitly draw a link between Afrikaans and Dutch in any of her writing about *(Re)asisting Narratives*, she does anchor the exhibition’s mission in uncovering “lingering legacies of colonialism between South Africa and the Netherlands.” Dutch nationalism is inextricably linked to Apartheid separatist and Bantu Education policies, and Afrikaans was specifically enforced in service of these political agendas.
Although Fanon theorizes the adoption of western European languages as a mechanism of colonial subordination, Frank generates friction with this argument by including English and Dutch translations of her curatorial statement. The presence of both languages demonstrates how the transmission of cultural production like language can be at once hierarchical and rhizomatic. In other words, language can be violently enforced but also transmuted to support resistance efforts. Frank considers the role of multilingualism in decoloniality with her curatorial decision to include *Straatpraat(j)es: Remember to Onthou* (2016) by the Burning Museum Arts Collective. In keeping with the collective’s commitment to wheat pasting as a political and aesthetic intervention, they bring this public artform indoors to engage with the architecture of the enclosed Framer Framed gallery. The work is installed in two parts on the upper and lower levels of the gallery. On the upper level, a large scale text-heavy print is pasted on a hallway wall. The text is an excerpt from an Afrikaans school textbook that outlines some of the “standardized” Dutch-based spelling rules for Afrikaans (Figure 12). Behind the text is sheet music staff, which serves as a kind of ruled paper for the text. Overlaid on the music staff are silhouettes of people, their hands raised above their heads ostensibly in protest or celebration.

The grammar rules featured in the installation homogenize the linguistic components of Afrikaans as solely being of Dutch origin. This perspective neglects the influence of Khoisan and Malay Afrikaans speakers in the development of the language. The Burning Museum Arts Collective addresses this omission visually through the integration of music staff as the text ruling. The Collective explains that music staffing references the creolization of Dutch and Black Southern African cultures as a result of colonization. More specifically, the music staffing represents Carnivalesque music traditions like Cape Jazz, and how cultural
forms like music and language share processes of improvisatory, context driven exchange (“Straatpraatj(i)es”). Decoloniality is posited as a commitment to de-standardizing western eurocentricism and an acknowledgment of culture as a cyclical circulation of influences.


The second section of Remember to Onthou is a wheat pasted print installed along the walls of Framer Framed’s lower level corridor (Figure 13). The image visually references some of the elements of the print on the upper level, namely the silhouetted figures and the music staffing. The most prominent difference is the fact that Arabic-Afrikaans replaces Afrikaans as the featured text. In this work, the Arabic-Afrikaans text is a transliteration of
the same textbook excerpt from the upper level installation. Transliteration plays a significant role in resistance to the South African apartheid regime in that it demonstrates how language is a tool that can be adapted to reflect the cultural traditions non-European, non-Christian Afrikaans speakers.

Arabic-Afrikaans traces back to Arabic speaking Muslim Malay and Indonesian populations who were brought to South Africa by the Dutch to serve as an unpaid labor force (Versteegh 178). In 1862, Islamic Sheikh Abu Bakr Effendi was sent to Cape of Good Hope at the request of Queen Victoria of Britain to assist in the cultural acclamation of the Malays to South Africa. Upon arrival, he studied Afrikaans and in turn authored a book on Islamic law in Afrikaans, but written in Arabic cursive. This transliteration would come to be called “Arabic-Afrikaans” (Kamusella and Ndhlovu 21-22).
The process of transliteration aptly reflects how decoloniality is not a political condition temporally marked by the transition of power from colonial to Indigenous governance. Instead, it is an iterative, durational process that subverts and is entangled with colonial cultural formations. Rather than positioning Afrikaans squarely as the colonizer’s language, *Remember to Onthou* complicates how colonial cultural production, authenticity, and ownership circulates. The formation of Arabic-Afrikaans encompasses a variety of source material gained through appropriation and recontextualization.
The metaphor of transliteration brings to the fore the question undergirding this thesis: given its adjacency to the colonial legacy of museums, is it possible for curatorial practice to operate in service of decoloniality? More specifically, is it possible, as Frank proposes, for curatorial practice to exist “outside of the regimes of modernity” (“Policy Briefing”)? Even though she aligns her curatorial practice with Mignolo’s theory of delinking, the theory is destabilized by her inclusion of Straatpraatj(i)es in the exhibition. The work gestures to how systems of power, like the cultural production, do not operate unidirectionally. Rather, power is an exchange of influence between Indigenous and settler-colonial agents.

The role of multilingualism in both Drawing Lines and Re(as)sisting Narratives speaks to the political utility of Indigenous and settler cultural allegiances. The Wood Land School facilitators’ decision to include Arcand’s Cree sculpture points to the role of artistic practice in the resistance of systemic erasure of First Nations languages. The exhibition text translations in English, French, and Mohawk demonstrate how Indigeneity is a concept informed both in relation to and in opposition of colonization. Frank’s inclusion of the Burning Museum Arts Collective’s Afrikaans and Arabic-Afrikaans wheat paste installations, as well as the exhibition text translations in English and Dutch, show how political subversion can be actualized through the strategic appropriation of settler-colonial methodologies.

As Tuck and Wang stress, decolonization must be specific in its mission towards land and cultural repatriation by and for Indigenous peoples (21). Though other social justice movements have adopted “decolonial” as a metaphor for institutional dismantlement, Tuck and Wang consider this tendency as exemplative of the “entangled triad structure settler-
native-slave” that defines settler-colonialism. The fact that both *Re(as)sisting Narratives* and *Drawing Lines* are hosted by settler colonial institutions illuminates this entangled triad structure in practice. However, I believe that multilingualism is employed in both projects to illuminate how interaction with settler institutions cannot be simplistically distilled to be a capitulation to coloniality. Rather, the inclusion of multilingualism and partnership with settler colonial institutions suggest how “delinking” does not adequately address the textures and paradoxes of that shape cultural transmission.
Spatialized metaphor: “Line,” “Center,” “Inside,” and “Outside”

Metaphor plays an important role in how humans conceptualize their relationship to the deeply abstract notion of “space.” Western eurocentric colonial projects have been shaped by Cartesian theorizations of space and the political reverberations of these theorizations are manifested in Drawing Lines and Re(as)sisting Narratives. In this subsection, I trace the western eurocentric theoretical emergence of linearity and three dimensionality. Following this overview, I consider specific spatialized vocabulary that has emerged from this discourse, and how it is used in curatorial writing to address decolonial politics.

The seventeenth century marks the starting point of Cartesian philosophy, which shaped western eurocentric understandings of the relationship among space, time, body and mind. According to Decartes’ three coordinate system, space can be mapped out algebraically through the placement of particular points at assigned distances along fixed, perpendicular planes (Başar 10). Linear perpendicularity and the three coordinate system became the prominent tools through which the geography of Earth and its territory were conceived. The philosophical symbolism of the line and its algebraic application also supported the concept of linear time, or the idea that time is a unidirectional trajectory marked by the coordinates “past,” “present,” and “future.” These coordinates are conceptual frameworks that have come to define “orthogenesis,” the nineteenth century paleontological theory that organisms inherently evolve or progress with a “forward” momentum (MacFadden 27).

The three coordinate system and linear time scale are bound together philosophically due to their dependence on the line as the key visual representation (Başa 10). Western
European colonizers used the three coordinate system to map out space from an abstract concept to a material object (i.e. territory) via geography. The capacity for humans to engage in this practice was considered orthogenetic, or proof of the advancement of the human species due to the development of mathematical concepts (Smith 52). Cartesian dualism is another philosophy that developed from three coordinate spatialization. According to this theory, “rationality” is the discrete separation between the mind (which is not linearly extendable and non-spatial) versus the body (which is linearly extendable and a spatial entity). Descartes distilled dualism to the goal of the body reaching “the center of the earth,” or the spatialized metaphor for rationality. In a modernist context, the human species is theorized as superior to other species because of its “rational” awareness of and as the “center.”

Because Cartesian dualism establishes a division between irrational nature and rational man, this bifurcation was applied to justify western European colonial expansion in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and beyond. Enlightenment philosophy proposed that colonialism is an orthogenetic project of human progress because it signified the ability of the western European man to use his mind to control his surrounding natural environment. This ability, according to western eurocentric colonial discourse, was impossible for non-European men, who were deemed inferior and inhuman (Smith 51). The dichotomy established between rationality and irrationality became the prism through which western European colonists theorized their commitment to territorial expansion of indigenous lands, annexation of natural resources, and slavery of Indigenous peoples.

Linearity and dualism are key concepts in Drawing Lines and deeply inform how the facilitators define Indigeneity. The exhibition’s full title, Drawing Lines from January to

60
December, uses the symbolic potency of the line to express how the project temporally unfolds. They write that the project demonstrates the “power of line to mark history and invoke memory,” and conceptualize their lines of inquiry as one “without beginning or end.” The lines serve as spatial and temporal signifiers for how to “collaboratively imagine Indigenous futurity” (Linklater et al). As Mark Rifkin writes in his book Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination, linear temporality reinforces "the colonizing interpellation of Indigenous peoples into settler social forms and dynamics" (179). Similar to Preziosi and Farago’s belief that the exhibitionary complex enforces a teleological perspective of modernity, Rifkin proposes that “contemporaneity” is a settler-colonial construct that canonizes Indigenous civilizations and cultural practices as regressive, or situated in the “past” (Preziosi 428; Rifkin 178). Indigenous temporal sovereignty, however, is "chronologically discontinuous forms of knowledge, experience, memory, extrahuman force, and relationship" (178). Given this definition, it is possible to read the Wood Land School’s application of linearity “against the grain.” The lines referenced in the project’s title are not beholden to the logics of Cartesian three coordinate spatialization, but rather, are boundless, their beginnings and endings untraceable. Through the abstraction of the line as formless, the Wood Land School facilitators conceptualize the line as a spatial metaphor for opacity as opposed to bifurcation.

In her landmark text Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States (2014), Audra Simpson maps a “cartography of refusal,” or the ways Kahnawa’ke Mohawk communities resist U.S. American and Canadian federal “recognition” (33). Among the strategies Simpson references is the Kahnawa’ke Mohawk rejection of federally issued passports in favor of Haudenosaunee issued documents. These tactics, she proposes,
demystify the goals of “inclusion” and critique the notion of settler colonial citizenry as aspirational. I propose that Wood Land School facilitators similarly refuse traceability or settler colonial recognition by reconceptualizing the line as a metaphor for the refusal of western eurocentric colonial spatial logics.

The complications to this analysis, of course, rest with the reference the exhibition title makes to “January through December.” Months are associated with the western eurocentric Gregorian calendar rather than a Mohawk temporal metric. I believe the co-existence of western eurocentric temporality and an Indigenous ontological perspective of linearity creates generative friction because it illuminates the reality of entanglement by operating “with an awareness that settler colonialism is ever present” in their work, despite their identification as Indigenous peoples (T. Linklater). In keeping with Puar’s theorizations about intersectionality, contradiction demonstrates how “…the relationships between theory, practice and pedagogy manifest across the complexity and diversity of Indigenous identities, and in relation to settler colonial positionings” (Linklater et al).

Similar to Drawing Lines, Re(as)sisting Narratives uses metaphor to articulate a philosophy of time and space. Frank situates the exhibition within a discourse of decolonial aesthetics, which is a theory that seeks to destabilize the binaristic paradigm of primitivism versus modernity. She proposes that curatorial inclusion of artistic practices from the global South supports subversive epistemologies that exist “outside of the regimes of modernity” (“Policy Briefing”). The “outside” is a politically charged spatial metaphor because it suggests the potential for curatorial practice to be removed, or delinked, from its colonial legacies of theft, classification, and aesthetic hierarchy. However, I argue that it is worth considering how situating oneself outside of the regimes of modernity paradoxically centers
western eurocentrism. In *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, Gurminder K. Bhambra destabilizes the prevalent scholarly perspective that western europe “owns” the concept of modernity (58). She applies pressure to this hierarchical application of modernity by proposing the existence of:

...multiple modernities, so as to “[de-link] our understanding of the socio-historic processes from a European trajectory and focusing on not only the different sources and roots, but also on the ways these interacted and intersected over time would provide us with a richer understanding of the complexities of the world in which we live and the historical processes the constitute it. (76)

Bhambra’s proposal of multiple modernities creates necessary friction against Frank’s curatorial provocation. It illuminates how Frank’s notion of decoloniality privileges Enlightenment philosophies of time and space as discrete entities. By emphasizing the richness of multiplicity, Bhambra invalidates the notion that one can really ever exist “outside” of any socio-historical context. The political utility of curatorial practice, I believe, is not in a denial of its colonial scaffolding, as Frank suggests in her essay. Rather, the political utility of curatorial practice is in the capacity for curators to confront their colonial complicity so that they are held accountable by artists and publics for their decision making.

The spatial metaphor of the line and the concept of “outside” versus “center” are dependent on one another for validity. As previously stated, Tuhiwai Smith writes that the line is the key visualization of colonial conquest because it is used to graphically demarcate or “stake claim” to Indigenous ancestral lands. The linear demarcation of borders enforces a geographical division of “outside” and “inside” through nationalism. In Southern Africa and
on Turtle Island, the territorial boundaries as defined by colonial governments not only
dispossessed Indigenous peoples of the lands they long inhabited, but also disrupted the
organization of communities and cultures rooted to the land. Both *Drawing Lines* and
*Re(as)sisting Narratives* consider the contemporary art gallery as a microcosm of colonial
territorial annexation. Through curatorial practice, both projects seek to invert notions of
“outside” and “inside” by manipulating the line and its political and spatial significations.
By situating the projects in settler-operated galleries, the curators of *Drawing Lines* and
*Re(as)sisting Narratives* experiment with liminality, or the possibility of existing along the
center, outside, and inside of settler colonial and Indigenous subject positions.

The Wood Land School facilitators state that their primary relationships in *Drawing
Lines* are “indigenous to indigenous, which includes land and non-humans.” However
through their allegiance with settler-operated SBC, the Wood Land School facilitators are
committed to the question of what it means for a “settler-colonial institution to unknown its
power” while also considering what it means to “memorialize and dream in relation” to
settler allies. In *Drawing Lines*, decoloniality is the deft negotiation of separatism and
collaboration. While they clearly express that it is critical for the project to be Indigenous-led, the facilitators also acknowledge the necessity of settler-colonial partnership. In this
context, notions of “outside,” “inside,” and “center” are at once defined and porous.

In “Policy Briefing: Towards a Decolonial Curatorial Practice,” Frank emphasizes
that her decolonial curatorial practice involves an vision of artists and administrators as
“equal partners,” through structural modes of accountability that determine “who is served by
the inclusion of neglected memories and practices of Diasporic communities.” These
structural modes of accountability exist “outside the regimes of modernity,” a statement that
inevitably privileges a definition of modernity from a western eurocentric philosophical lineage. Frank uses “outside” from an activist subject position in order to call for the need of increased representation of non-white, queer, non-cis male, and disabled artists. However, I bristle at Frank’s application of the word because of its reification of binary dualism. Though “outside” is applied as a refusal of white-cis-hetero homogeneity, it frames identities in a fixed relationship to white-cis-hetero homogeneity. The word presumes the possibility of ahistoricity, disassociation from a political context, and reinforces orientation around the Cartesian notion of a ubiquitous center point.

The comparative analyses of Drawing Lines and Re(as)sisting Narratives do not aim to determine which project is more “successful” in its pursuit of decoloniality. Rather, these projects demonstrate how decoloniality is a practice that is deeply informed by the colonial histories of specific cultural contexts. In curatorial decisions made about authorship, multilingualism, exhibition site, and artwork installation, what is revealed is a more nuanced articulation of power hierarchies among settler and Indigenous communities. Through the articulations of refusal and practice of appropriation, the curators and artists muddle expectations for how colonial subversion is actualized, and propose alternative ways of being in relation to circumstances that are of us, for us, in us, against us, and beyond us.

By envisioning power as operating rhizomatically rather than hierarchically, I propose that decoloniality is not a process whereby colonized people return to a “pre-colonial” point of origin. In fact, I heavily critique Frank’s statement that her curatorial practice exists “outside of the regimes of modernity.” Decoloniality, I believe, is the act of unraveling systems of toxicity while in the process of doing so, acknowledging how one is implicated by, participates in, and resists such systems. Decolonial curatorial practice is not a
utopian demand, but an expression of one’s relationship with and negotiation of power in its many forms.
Conclusion

Initially, the goal of this thesis was to identify and analyze decolonial approaches to curatorial practice. Through critical reflections of *Re(as)sisting Narratives* and *Drawing Lines*, I learned about the dimensionality of Indigenous political histories across the Americas and Africa. Decoloniality, as evidenced in each of the projects, is not a process that can be applied formulaically. Rather, it is a means of relation that is historically and culturally specific to place. To commit oneself to decoloniality does not absolve one from the untidiness of contradiction. The practice calls for a commitment to situatedness, or a recognition of the ways in which one’s subjectivity participates in the circulation of power and value. This situatedness involves an active negotiation of complicity, appropriation, redistribution and refusal that requires curators to be attuned with and accountable for their decision making.

In this critical engagement of situatedness, the Wood Land School facilitators and Chandra Frank participate in resource redistribution. By locating their projects in settler-operated contemporary art galleries, they utilize the resources of space, the labor of staff, and the public visibility of the institution to support the artistic practices of Indigenous and Black-identified artists. This redistribution, facilitated in partnership with settler-operated institutions, poses possibilities for the exhibitionary complex to redress its legacy of dispossession. Such redistribution also demonstrates how settler-operated contemporary art galleries can and should participate in a reparations economy in order to support Indigenous and Black artistic and intellectual thought. This matrix of socio-political accountability has material reverberations that swell beyond the gallery walls.
Along with redistribution, the Wood Land School facilitators and Frank navigate the practice of refusal, appropriation, and acceptance which is evidenced through the strategic use of written language. While both projects identify as operating within decolonial politics, they take divergent strategies in their use of vocabulary. The Wood Land School critiques institutional hierarchies by refusing “curator” in favor “facilitator” and by referring to their project as a series of “gestures” rather than as an “exhibition.” On the other hand, Frank leans into the assertion of hierarchy, as she self-identifies as a “lead curator” and refers to her project squarely as an “exhibition.” Through refusal, the Wood Land School proposes the construction of new terminology that puts forth a non-hierarchical ethics of relation that emphasizes interconnectivity and mutability. In the assertion of hierarchy, Frank seeks to defy the tradition of white cis-male curatorial leadership by emphasizing her curatorial subjectivity as a queer Black, Dutch, South African-identified woman.

What both projects do share, however, is their acceptance and integration of multilingualism. The curatorial texts of *Drawing Lines* and *Re(as)sisting Narratives* are translated English, Dutch, French, and First Nations languages like Mohawk, and artworks by the Burning Museum Arts Collective and Joi Arcand integrate Arabic-Afrikaans and Cree. Rather than positioning multilingualism as capitulation to colonial hierarchy, both projects accept this phenomenon so as to invalidate the notion of Indigenous cultural authenticity. Through the refusal and appropriation of written language, decoloniality is envisaged as a syncretic process that involves both Indigenous and settler cultural production.

In addition to vocabulary usage, metaphor plays a critical role in how decoloniality is theorized and applied in *Drawing Lines* and *Re(as)sisting Narratives*. The symbolic resonance of the “line” has traceable roots to western eurocentric Enlightenment philosophy
and colonial territorialization, and as I examine the preceding chapters, provides the theoretical grounding for how “outside,” “inside,” and “center” are defined. The Wood Land School facilitators name their project *Drawing Lines from January to December*, and read against the Enlightenment notion of unidirectional linear temporarily in favor of an opaque, boundless conception of this mark. Their theorization of the line is reflected in how they acknowledge their relationship with SBC, the settler-operated gallery that hosted the project. They define their decolonial project as Indigenous-led and concerned with human and non-human beings, while at the same time acknowledging liminality, or the need for settler partnerships and resources in order for their practice to be actionable. On the other hand, Frank clearly states that *Re(as)sisting Narratives* exists “outside of the regimes of modernity,” and proposes the necessity of a curatorial practice that can, to cite Mignolo, “delink” itself from the conditions of coloniality.

These divergent applications of spatialized metaphor represent what I believe to be the critical insight of this thesis. Decoloniality does not mean to deny one’s entanglement in settler coloniality, nor does it signify a process whereby a one returns to a “pre-colonial” state of being. What acknowledgment of entanglement does, however, is demand accountability for one’s actions to oneself and to the communities one is part of. The visualization of power as rhizomatic rather than hierarchical holds space for understandings of identity that are thickly layered with a variety of source material.

In other words, I believe that the proposal of decoloniality as existence “outside of the regimes of modernity” is an example of what Tuck and Yang refer to as a “settler move to innocence,” or an effort to evade responsibility for one’s participation in coloniality. As an anti-racist and anti-capitalist, I do not purport to live outside of the regimes of racial
capitalism, to paraphrase Frank. To exist “outside” of this system would be akin to saying that I am “colorblind,” which would ostensibly deny me the opportunity to engage with my subjectivity, how anti-blackness pervades my subjectivity, and how I benefit from capitalist economics on a daily basis. As a curator, to conceive of myself as existing outside of such systems is not only a form of denial, but a reinscription of violence.

What this thesis seeks to propose is that a decolonial curatorial practice necessitates resource redistribution through the development of Indigenous and settler allegiance. A rhizomatic visualization of power does not intend to deny the material and political inequities of colonialism as experienced by Indigenous and Black peoples. Rather, it can serve as a helpful tool for curators to understand the ways their subjectivities inform how they ascribe and circulate value, and can help them identify their proximity to and allocation of material resources like funding, real estate, and education. Given that the United States has not yet launched a truth and reconciliation commission (and likely never will), I believe that arts institutions can serve as a leader in a decolonial political process through a strategic redistribution of monetary and professional resources for Indigenous and Black arts professionals. Specific recommendations for institutional implementation include:

I. The development of an Indigenous Land Acknowledgment, written in close consultation with the Indigenous peoples who are tribally affiliated with the region in which the institution is located. In addition to recognition of presence on Indigenous ancestral lands and the history of genocide, this statement must include specific action steps to support Indigenous-led initiatives and programming. This statement should be featured on all institutional materials both in digital and print, be spoken by staff at the start of any public program, and should be revisited and revised annually.

II. The development of a Slavery Acknowledgment, written in close consultation with African-descended peoples who live in the community in which the institution is located. In addition to recognition of presence on Indigenous ancestral lands, this statement must acknowledge the legacy of slavery,
genocide, and institutionalized racism that defines the foundation of the United States. It should also include specific action steps to support African diasporic-led initiatives and programming. This statement should be featured on all institutional materials both in digital and print, be spoken by staff at the start of any public program, and should be revisited and revised annually.

III. Professional development specifically for early career Indigenous and Black curators in the form of paid curatorial fellowships, paid internship opportunities, and salaried positions.

IV. Arts institutions should allocate a percentage of their annual curatorial programming budget to a participatory budgeting and curatorial process that is Indigenous and Black-led.

V. Arts institutions that are not owned and operated by Indigenous and/or Black-identified peoples should offer rehearsal, office, and theater rentals to Indigenous and Black-identified peoples free of charge.

*Drawing Lines* and *Re(as)sisting Narratives* come into being through the strategic formation of allegiances with settler-operated institutions as well as with Indigenous and Black-identified artists. Such allegiances do not signify a capitulation to coloniality, or to put it colloquially, “selling out.” The metaphorical theorization of decoloniality without a change of material conditions is a reinscription of colonial violence. In partnership with settler-identified peoples who are committed to unknowing their power, I propose that curatorial practice is a political tool that can enact Indigenous and Black cultural repatriation through the construction of a reparations economy.


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