

# The Feminist Museum Hack: Making a creative disruptive pedagogical, investigative and analytical tool

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## Abstract:

How do we illuminate patriarchal ideologies that hide in plain sight in museums and art galleries and still play a powerful active role shaping and mobilising problematic gendered constructions that re-enforce gender injustice and oppression? This question was central to our development of the Feminist Museum Hack, an innovative pedagogical, investigative, analytical and interventionist practice we have designed to use in the complex context of cultural institutions. In this article, we share the various components of the Hack, its aim to strengthen analytical and visual skills and connect disconnects of language and image. The Hack makes a valuable contribution to feminist adult education by enabling us to see the unseen of intrinsic patriarchal ideologies in museums. Further, the Hack works to develop imagination and sharpen an oppositional feminist gaze, giving us a sense of agency with which to disrupt the privileged authority of museums and unearth their problematic discursive, visual and rhetorical politics that have implications for seeing and knowing gender beyond their walls.

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## Keywords:

museums; feminist cultural theory; agency; representation; authority; the unseen

## A organização feminista dos museus: produção de um instrumento pedagógico, investigativo, analítico, criativo e disruptivo

**Resumo:** Como é que podem ser compreendidas as ideologias patriarcais que se escondem por detrás da organização de museus de arte e que se traduzem num forte impacto modelador e mobilizador nas construções de género, reforçando a injustiça e a opressão de género? Esta foi a questão central para o desenvolvimento deste artigo. Neste texto, procuramos discutir uma inovadora prática pedagógica, mas também de investigação, de análise e de intervenção que desenhamos para compreender os complexos contextos culturais das instituições mencionadas. Neste artigo, abordamos diversas componentes e objetivos desta prática pedagógica em museus a partir de preocupações feministas. Esta abordagem visa reforçar as capacidades analíticas e visuais dos visitantes, bem como ligar e desligar a linguagem e a imagem, de modo a perceber as ideologias patriarcais não visíveis e implícitas que podem ser identificadas nos museus. Neste sentido, este texto surge como uma contribuição que se espera valiosa para a educação de adultos femininos. De acrescentar que consideramos que esta prática pedagógica visa desenvolver a imaginação, a partir de um olhar feminista de oposição e de um sentido de agência que procura romper com a autoridade privilegiada dos museus, desconstruindo as políticas discursivas, visuais e retóricas problemáticas que nestas instituições podem ser encontradas e que têm implicações no modo como se vê e se conhece as questões de género para lá dos muros dos museus.

**Palavras-chave:** museus; teoria cultural feminista; agência; representação; autoridade; o invisível

## L'organisation féministe des musées: produire un instrument pédagogique, de recherche, analytique, créatif et disruptif

**Résumé:** Comment pouvons-nous comprendre les idéologies patriarcales qui se cachent derrière l'organisation des musées d'art, qui ont un fort impact sur la forme et son mobilisateurs des constructions de genre en même temps qu'ils renforcent l'injustice et l'oppression de genre? Celle-ci, c'est la question centrale qui a permis le développement de cet article. Dans ce texte nous discutons une pratique pédagogique innovatrice, qui est simultanément une pratique de recherche, d'analyse et d'intervention que nous avons construite pour comprendre les complexes contextes culturels qui sont les musées. Dans cet article nous discutons de différents aspects et objectifs de cette pratique pédagogique dans les musées à partir de préoccupations féministes. Cette discussion permet de renforcer les capacités analytiques et visuelles des visiteurs, bien que lier et délier le langage et l'image, afin d'interpréter les idéologies patriarcales non-visibles et implicites que nous pouvons trouver dans les musées. Nous espérons que ce texte soit ainsi une contribution importante pour l'éducation des adultes féministes. Nous considérons que cette pratique pédagogique vise développer l'imagination, à partir d'un regard féministe et d'un sens d'agence qui veut rompre avec l'autorité privilégiée des musées, en déconstruisant les politiques discursives, visuelles et rhétoriques problématiques que les musées peuvent contenir et qui ont des implications dans la forme comme nous percevons et connaissons les questions de genre au-delà des murs des musées.

**Mots clés:** musées; théorie culturelle féministe; agence; représentation; autorité; l'invisible.

## La organización feminista de los museos: Produciendo una herramienta pedagógica disruptiva, investigativa, analítica y creativa.

**Resumen:** ¿Cómo pueden ser desveladas las ideologías patriarcales que se encuentran detrás de la organización de los museos de arte y que se traducen en un fuerte impacto modelador y mobilizador de las construcciones de género, reforzando la injusticia y la opresión de género? Esta ha sido la pregunta central para el desarrollo de este artículo. En el texto procuramos discutir una práctica pedagógica innovadora, pero también de investigación, de análisis y de intervención que diseñamos para comprender los complejos contextos culturales de las instituciones mencionadas. Abordamos en el artículo los diversos componentes y objetivos de esta práctica pedagógica en los museos a partir de las preocupaciones feministas. Este enfoque busca reforzar las capacidades analíticas y visuales de las personas visitantes, así como conectar y desconectar el lenguaje y la imagen, para percibir las ideologías patriarcales no visibles e implícitas que pueden ser identificadas en los museos. En este sentido, el texto surge como una contribución, con la aspiración de ser valiosa, a la educación de personas adultas feminista. Consideramos que esta práctica pedagógica busca desarrollar la imaginación, a partir de una mirada feminista de oposición y que procura romper con la autoridad privilegiada de los museos, deconstruyendo las políticas discursivas, visuales y retóricas problemáticas que pueden ser encontradas en estas instituciones y tienen implicaciones en el modo como se ve y se conocen los asuntos de género más allá de las paredes de los museos.

**Palabras clave:** museos; teoría cultural feminista; acciones; representación; autoridad; lo invisible

## Introduction

A Mr. Windschuttle in Australia once argued “feminists...have no place in a national museum because not one of them were (sic) major players in national history (quoted in Casey, 2001, p. 233). The disappointing grammar aside, his sentiments would not be out of place in many museums and art galleries (hereafter, museums) in the last century or this one. The life stories, social contributions and cultural practices of women and feminists have been all but absent from, or at least peripheral to, authoritative masculine historical, aesthetic, and social narratives of our arts and culture institutions. Feminist cultural theorist Pollock (1988, p.1) thus also queries “are feminism and the museum, as we know them, compatible at any level?”, albeit through a feminist and therefore very different lens.

As feminist adult educators we are committed to gender justice and change, to finding ways to educate and investigate gender oppression. Although museums have never been considered in feminist adult education we are passionate about working with them as ubiquitous, complex ‘pedagogic contact zones’ (McRobbie, 2009) which through the power of representation – visual and textual – shape knowledge, produce understanding and mobilise naturalisation of gender - masculinity and femininity. In other words, as powerful storytellers and symbolisers museums show and tell us who we are, what we should value, what counts as knowledge and history, what has aesthetic distinction and, by exclusion or misrepresentation, what has lesser value or importance (Clover, 2015; Borg & Mayo, 2010; Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013). While some museums are designing new representations to challenge problematic portrayals of women, feminism and femininity and tell new stories about women’s cultural and socio-historical contributions, traditional masculinised representations remain steadfast. This is deeply concerning but it has provided us with an opportunity.

Taking Mr Windschuttle’s words as our challenge, and believing feminists belong very much in museums not only as history-makers and artists but as educators, investigators and provocateurs, we have designed what we call the *Feminist Museum Hack*, an instrument to explore and expose problematic gendered codifications, constructions and ideological assumptions that hide in plain sight. In this article we share this innovative feminist pedagogical, analytical and methodological tool and show how it allows us to pay attention to what the complex storied and visual culture of museums are really saying about women and gender in the past and today. We begin by briefly situating museums within inter-weaving discourses of representation, knowledge construction and education. From there we explore some of the feminist cultural theories of representation and gendered challenges that frame the *Hack*. We conclude with a discussion of various components of the *Hack*. Central to our discussion is a conviction that the *Hack*, as an adaptable pedagogical, analytical and interventionist tool,

makes an important contribution to feminist adult education and research by opening up museums as sites for critical gender teaching and learning. The *Hack* encourages important visual critical literacies aimed to create what this volume's Editors call 'really useful knowledge' which for us is around hidden ideologies of patriarchy that reinforce sexism. The *Hack* is also empowering because it disrupts the privileged masculine authority of the discursive, visual and rhetorical dimensions of museums.

## Representation, knowledge and education

In 1997 UNESCO positioned museums as "first of all learning spaces [that] provided a plethora of important education/learning opportunities for adults", although acknowledged the marginal role they play in "current adult education practice" (p. 4). UNESCO suggested the reason was how "out of touch with the teaching practices and principles of adult education" they were (p. 5). Traditional pedagogical practices, such as "the downward spread of knowledge" from experts to the masses is certainly antithetical to the respectful, participatory learning ambitions of adult education (Kaplan, 1996, p. 3). Moreover, museums have well-deserved reputations as elitist, colonial and exclusionary and therefore are bound to be overlooked in a field that challenges oppression and marginalisation.

And yet museums are extremely important and need to be on the radar of adult education. They have become ubiquitous features of the landscape and studies show more people are visiting them than ever before (e.g. Bergsdottir, 2016; Conn, 2010). Studies also show museums are deeply trusted by the public, having socialised us to believe what they show and tell is truthful, factual, objective, and agenda-free (e.g. Coxall, 1991; Janes, 2015). Put another way, their stories are often seen "as authoritative or definitive interpretations whose legitimacy brooks no challenge" (Whitehead, 2009, p. 31). Whitehead (2009) sees museums as active agents of communication and knowledge creation, and thus, adult education. The primary tool museums use to educate is 'the practice of representation' - a combination of visual and textual displays, such as exhibitions, objects, artworks, curatorial and explanatory labels (e.g. Bergsdottir, 2016; Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013; Whitehead, 2009). To represent, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means to describe or depict [something], to call it up in the mind by description, portrayal or imagination: to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses (see Hall et al, 2013, p. 2). As a signifying practice acting in a diversity of social contexts and institutional settings, representation has an extraordinary impact on what we consider to be legitimate knowledge, to have meaning and value, and to be real or normative. For Whitehead (2009), "knowledges are both accounts (for example of the past and/or of materials objects such as sculptures) and ways of accounting, or to put it another way, modes of representation" (p. 8). Representations are

not simply “the results of perception, learning and reasoning; they are also processes of perception, learning and reasoning which produce particularised results” (p. 9). Carson and Pajaczkowska (2001, p. 1) argue the power of representation resides in ‘the seen’ because this sense more than any other “is considered evidence, truth and factual, as sight establishes a particular relation to the reality in which a visual is considered” (p. 1). What we see, and the setting of this seeing such as the authoritative and trusted context of the museum, together play a constitutive role in shaping what becomes ‘common sense’ or truth. Seeing gives organised existence to everything from history to the present, aesthetics to identity, society to nature. Conversely, when probing the shadows of representation Carson and Pajaczkowsk draw attention to the “a complex relation between the seen and the unseen” (p. 1), with the former acting as a façade for the latter, “a means to conceal an underlying system of meaning” (p. 1) that (un)consciously yet intentionally shapes knowing and meaning.

## Gender and representation

For many feminist cultural theorists, this system of meaning is the ideology of patriarchy, the patriarchal gaze, and it permeates museum representations. Marshment (1993) reminds us that “ideology can be a powerful source of inequality as well as a rationalisation of it” (p. 124). For this reason, Marshment argues, “representation is political” (p. 123) and therefore a feminist issue. It is this masculine gaze, the power to position and portray women and the world from the male viewpoint that is the most evident in museums. This gaze has silenced women by absenting them from narratives of art and history, but equally it has created structures of domination by constructing femininity as fragility, dependency, incapacity, and inactivity to act as “a foil to the masculine usurpation of activity, productivity [and] creativity” (Pollock, 1988; p. 136).

Most challenging here is that museum representations are not deliberate acts of oppression. Rather, they appear to be simply ‘common sense’ -- that women want “to totter around on high heels to make themselves attractive to men” and cannot be company directors appears to be the order of things, just as men ‘naturally’ “are spared the drudgery of domestic chores, can have the most of the best jobs, and status and wealth that come with them” (Marshment, 1993, p. 123). These taken-for-granted ‘common sense realities’ function pedagogically to foreclose views that disrupt this norm and is the insidiousness Gramsci (1971) called ‘unforced, tacit consent’. The power of the masculinist gaze and its constructions have lulled us into accepting particular realities about women and men as normative and true. Through images and narratives of heroism, greatness, strength and genius so pervasive throughout museums, we learn, for example, that “creativity is an exclusive masculine prerogative and that as a consequence, the term artist automatically refers to man” (Pollock, 1988, p. 29).

Categorisations of ‘woman’ in museums are in fact “shot through by other categories of social identity such as ethnicity” (Lazar, 2005, p. 1). There is, however, a growing number of women’s artworks and stories in museums, but for the most part, masculinised constructions remain steadfast (e.g. Clover, Sanford, Bell & Johnson, 2016).

### **Feminist resistance is (not) futile; it is necessary**

Resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations and in the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces.

Mohanty, 1989, p. 208)

It would be fair under these circumstances to question why we would want to intervene into, paraphrasing Pollock (1988), these reactionary outposts of patriarchal bias. Our argument for this attention is twofold. Firstly, as noted above, museums are significant sites of culture and culture is “a circuit of power, ideologies, and values” (Giroux, 2004, p. 62) that mobilises “representations of the world past and present” (Hall, et al, 2013, p. 127), thus shaping our knowledge, identity and understandings. Whether one frequents museums or not, they subtly influence how we view women and men. Further, although museums radiate an unquestionable masculine authority to dictate our understandings, culture is never fixed, rather, it is a zone of active struggle, contestation and negotiation, as noted earlier (Borg & Mayo, 2010; Hall, et al, 2013). Public museums are under pressure to transform themselves into ‘agents of change’ (e.g. Clover et al, 2016; Janes, 2015) and we want to be part of this change.

Secondly, Pollock (1988) reminds us that feminist interventions in art and culture “histories are not some nice, optional or avoidable add-on. They are a redefinition of the objects we are studying and the theories and methods with which we are doing it.” For us, wrestling with museums is not an add-on, but an integral part of our work to unearth patriarchy in all its forms and contexts. Our interventionist work matters because “sexism is far from having been eliminated from contemporary organization and functioning, or from social and interpersonal relationships between men and women” (Ostrouch-Kamińska & Vieira, 2014, p. 4). The stereotypes we thought long debunked “are re-emerging in many spheres” (English & Irving, 2015, p. 6). We have witnessed a plethora of highly visible misogynist acts over the past two years on university campuses, in the military, the police and the justice system as a whole, as well as in both social and mainstream media worldwide. Kimmel (2013) speaks of ‘cognitive dissonance’, the ability to dismiss misogynist acts as merely ‘harmless bits of fun’ or the fault of the woman, and to disarticulate feminism as a necessary, broad political strategy for

gender and other equities (e.g. Bates, 2018; Clover & Sanford, 2016; McRobbie, 2009). Feminist scholars such as hooks (1994) challenge us to find ways to unpick complex gender inequalities and oppressions through embodied pedagogical practices. Feminist adult educators Manicom and Walters (2012) call for new “pedagogies of possibility” grounded in both pragmatic assessment and the imagination “which might become thinkable and actionable when prevailing relations of power are made visible, when understandings shake loose from normative perspectives and generate new knowledge and possibilities for engagement” (p. 4). The Feminist Museum Hack is our response. Its ability to unearth and challenge the stories and representations of women in these institutions is our contribution to the struggle for gender justice and change.

## Feminist Interventions and the Museum Hack

To hack means to enter without authorisation or authority. Inspiration for the *Feminist Museum Hack* came from the work of Canadian educators de Oliveira Jayme, Gough, Sanford, Monk, Mimick, and O'Connor (2016). They used “hacking the museum” as a form of pedagogy to encourage their students to think about how these institutions “produce and reproduce historical social injustices” (p. 215).

A series of critical questions guided us to design the *Hack*, and make it an analytical, pedagogical and interventionist tool aimed to render visible the ‘grand narrative’ of the museum and its implications for gender justice and change. How can we penetrate the museum’s powerful authoritative gender codifications, narratives and imaginings? How do we disrupt the masculine gaze? How do we create capacities to question, to see and to render visible relationships between museum language and representations and obscure but controlling patriarchal ideologies? How do we imaginatively disrupt the myths, stereotypes and misrepresentations of women, femininity and even feminism in the museum? What women’s stories are told and whose are not? *The Hack* combines the central tenets of feminist research and feminist adult education. It is an overtly political perspective, exploring how women and gender “are shaped in relations of power and invested with interests” (Pollock, 1988, p. xix). It also centres on praxis, feminist theory practised and embodied within a museum space. *The Hack* is also a means to disrupt and re-write museum narratives as we elaborate below.

We have applied the *Hack* to a variety of permanent and temporary exhibitions in anthropological, historical, textile, war, photography, doll and art museums in Canada, Italy, India, Portugal, Denmark and United Kingdom. The diversity of museums means the *Hack* is not fixed or tightly defined; it is a fluid process continually in the making. For each site, we modify the *Hack* questions to align with the museum narrative and content. We have explored these sites as researchers, with students and community groups. Below we tease out some of its rudiments.

*Visual, textual and spatial analysis*

The Hack weaves together feminist discourse analysis and visual methodology. Feminist discourse analysis recognises the political importance of textual analysis (Carson & Pajaczkowska, 2001, p. 9). It uncovers the complex yet frequently subtle ways in which taken-for-granted gender “assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, perpetuated, negotiated and challenged” (Lazar, 2005, p. 2). We designed questions to penetrate the language, in particular of the labelling and curatorial statements, to expose the relationship between language and ideology. We ask: Is the language empowering or patronising? Does the language ‘assume’ something? For example, in an art museum in England, all the labels for the artworks by women positioned them in relation to men, as the wife, daughter or sister of a famous male. What does this tell us about the autonomy and agency of women and/or as artists? What were the ‘strings’ attached to women’s lives and do they exist in other forms today?

Central to feminist visual culture is the power of what Pollock (1988) calls the ‘scripto-visual’. For us this is a combination of representations and written texts and how they operate together to shape, normalise and validate. Feminist visual methodologies “confront cultural practices with questions about difference, formulating new theories and methods of analysis with which to re-write phallogocentric monoculture in a way that fully includes the missing histories of women’s and other contributions” (Pollock, 1988, p. xxi). Principal to feminist visual methods is semiotic analysis, the ability to read images, including their symbols, representations, and positionality to uncover depths of meaning. To unpick meaning, we use a number of questions: What are the women doing in the artwork? If both men and women are in the work, how do they compare? What is the central story of this diorama or this image? Students have uncovered numerous problematic images in artworks such as forest scenes where women are naked and draped across branches whilst the men sit fully clothed in deep discussion. “Women act as adornments to men who contemplate” was a comment by an infuriated female student who had frequented the museum but had never before made sense of the subtle messaging. And at times, visuals and texts are disconnected. Consider one diorama in a museum in British Columbia entitled *Men, animals and machines: Farming meant combining their power*. One of the few images is women prominently labouring in a field. Examining the cognitive dissonance between imagery and language reveals who farmers ‘really are’ hidden in the diorama’s discursive framing.

Further, museums are about place or placement. The Hack asks us to question how displays are positioned and what this tells us. For example, a museum in Ottawa curated a temporary exhibition of the suffragette movement in Manitoba. Problematically, however, the exhibition was in a hallway and poorly lit. Also, atop an original petition with hundreds of women’s (and men’s) signatures sat a small artefact -- a comic

gaggle of geese. What was the intention of this juxtaposition? Curatorial choices are consciously made in museum, not accidental (e.g. Marstine, 2006).

### *Permanence and Temporality*

Building on the above, another key aspect of the Hack is to explore ideas of permanence and temporality. How many of the permanent exhibitions are by or about women and how many of the temporary exhibits are by or about women? What do permanence and temporality say to museum visitors? In conversation with a curator in a museum in England following a Hack, he pointed out that the museum had little control over what it owned as a permanent collection. Often in smaller museums such as this, pieces are donated. While we accept that collections are what they are, we argue that the museum does have control over what it 'says' about the works in its permanent collection. That is, it could include new labels and/or provocative questions, as we provide them through the Hack.

Within the permanent collections we also employ the deceptively simple feminist cultural-quantitative practice of 'counting': How many of the artworks are by women and how many are by men? The aim is to query the prevailing masculine assumption that creativity and history belong to men (e.g. Pollock, 1988; Golding, 2013). In a major permanent gallery in a museum in Ottawa, we found two paintings by women amongst the hundreds by men. We also ask how many of the curators are women and whether or not this is discernable. Steedman (2012) reminds us that historically the curator has been invisible, which has given them an unexamined authority. In an era when the anonymity of social media is emboldening with ever more misogynist acts, drawing attention to this is a discussion worth having. In other words, only by drawing attention to the nebulousness of anonymity can we think about its consequences, the paradox of free speech versus the ability to silence. Naming the curator also enables us to see if the stories women curators tell, or how they speak and position objects and artworks, reflect an understanding of gender justice and change. While Malt (2006) has found women taking up curatorial roles in museums are putting "forward issues of equality in museum programmes and displays" (pp. 116), in the Middle East, Golding (2013) has found scant attention to feminism or gender justice in museums in Europe.

### *Critical Visual literacy - the oppositional feminist gaze*

There are, however, exhibitions with powerful feminist narratives and imagery. An innocuous piece of embroidery can inculcate "an ideology of femininity as devout, chaste and obedient" (Carson, 2001, p. 27) but then be challenged through curatorial statements. This was the case in a textile museum in Ontario, where images of women's embroidery were juxtaposed with curatorial statements throughout that drew attention to embroidery as a space for women to challenge subtly normative

patriarchal discourse. This temporary exhibit entitled *Kind Words Can Never Die* was a collection of needlework by anonymous women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that was collected by Jane Webster and curated by Anne Richard (2017). Curatorial statements uncover how these mottos, seemingly gentle and reinforcing of Protestant middle-class values, were used to instil these values in the bodies of the women creating them as they also shaped the domestic spaces they inhabited. The women, seen to have “superior moral capacity [were] tasked with using their power in the domestic sphere to influence the moral constitutions of their husbands and sons, laying the foundation for a stable society” (curatorial statement). The mottos comprised biblical quotes, song titles, and popular religious maxims, invoking through “memory, imitation and interpretation, their voices [that] produced a somewhat disquieting air that reverberates across time” (curatorial statement). However, these women and girls might well have been some of the original feminist hackers, as they selected, among a proliferation of mottos such as *Remember the Creator* and *What is a Home without a Mother*, others such as *Knowledge is Power*, *Dare to do Right*, and *Work out your own Salvation*. While these serve to support the moral constitution of home they can equally be read as a feminist stance. Throughout the exhibit are pleas for women to be heard and acknowledged even while relegated to the private spaces of the home. The mottos were in fact carefully selected social messages that can be read as markers of power, what Jefferies (2001) calls “imagery of women’s suffrage” (p. 190), as well as keepers of domestic equanimity. How did women’s stitching embody resistance and power as well as uphold domestic harmony?

#### *Disruption and agency*

For de Oliveira et al (2016), “the terminology ‘museum hacking’ suggests a kind of creative and productive disturbance by breaking into the accepted norms of particular museum narratives and modifying them” (p. 215). Bannerji, Carty, Delhi, Heald and McKenna (1991) remind us that to change this gendered world, we need to participate more actively in learning as ‘creators’, rather than simply as passive consumers.

The Feminist Hack is about direct agency, moving beyond passive spectatorship where we are encouraged to absorb pre-packaged displays and exhibitions, to become actors on the museum stage, participants in the re-making of the story of the museum. For example, armed with sticky post-it notes, we move through the galleries, attaching temporary labels to add to existing stories, giving advice in terms of missing histories and voices, or calling into question disjunctures between images and narratives. For example, a new sign was placed in a replica exhibit of old China Town to counter an alleyway sign that read “Brothels”, the only reference to Chinese women. Intervention is empowering because it challenges the authority of the museum, calling into question and rendering visible its limitations. As Freire (2000, p.64) once reminded us, “the oppressed must see examples

of the vulnerability of the oppressor so that a contrary conviction can begin to grow within them”.

Another form of intervention is to use green painter's tape to redact problematic language and different coloured dot stickers to identify works by women and works by men, creating a visual of gender imbalance. As to how long these interventions remain, the impact they have and whom they reach varies depending on circumstance. If partnering with museum educators, there is the possibility of interventions remaining in place for several weeks and reports of findings prepared for museums curators and administrators being taken seriously. If the Hack is undertaken during opening hours, it can engage the public. At the conclusion of the Hack in an art museum in England, a woman visitor asked us not to take down our post-it interventions because “they have added so much to my visit. They have made me think differently.”

We also use poetry. We ourselves, as well as Hack participants identify an artwork, objects or do a comparative of exhibitions and put these into poetic form. Poetry is important for women, feminist poet Lorde (1996) reminds us, because it “enables an overcoming of the intolerable or incomprehensible...[and] find the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare...institutional dehumanisation” (cited in Golding, 2013, p. 91).

## Conclusions

If we want our struggle for social change to be a political one, people should be given the tools to analyse the underlying systems of power that institutionalize and manipulate identities in ways that justify oppression, discrimination and often violence.

(Plantenga, 2012, p. 29)

If museums are vehicles and practices of representation, storytelling and meaning-making that are stereotyping, essentialising or excluding women, then that is what we learn, that is the knowledge they create and the ‘common-sense’ we begin to absorb. Bates (2018) reminds us sexist practices have become totally naturalized, making it difficult yet imperative to find ways to illuminate and challenge these.

We have chosen the museum as our platform and designed the *Hack* to initiate conversations and investigations into the ‘hidden’ of patriarchal ideology and its implications in terms of how we see women as everything from artists to history makers. For us, the *Hack* is a process still in the making, a creative and critical means to complicate spectatorship and consumption and make the abstract of ideology very concrete. The *Hack* allows us to disrupt visually a museum's problematic assumptions, and stereotyping and destabilise its power to show and tell through direct agency. If,

as feminist educator Mohanty reminds us, the “imagination is the most subversive thing a public can have” (p. vii), then the *Hack* is a means to stimulate the ‘feminist radical imagination’, a form of critical visual literacy that opens up new routes of seeing aimed to contribute to the pedagogical struggle for gender justice and change. We are conscious that a great deal more remains to be done, and we are in the process of thinking through how poetry, theatre, collage and other creative practices can play a stronger role in *Hack*. However, for right now this is an exciting step or tool of feminist adult education that takes us further down the road to creating the storehouse of knowledge required to bring about gender justice and transformation.

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