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DRIPPING PINK AND BLUE: SEEING THE UNSEEN OF PATRIARCHY THROUGH THE *FEMINIST MUSEUM HACK*[1]

ABSTRACT

In response to calls by feminist cultural theorists to develop means to unmask patriarchy, the system of power that lies at the heart of museums that maintain problematic hierarchical binaries of masculinity and femininity, we designed the Feminist Museum Hack. The Hack draws on theories of representation, feminist critical discourse analysis and visual methodologies/literacy to operate as a critical and creative practice that can be adapted to any museum context. The primary aim of the Hack – a methodology and pedagogy – is to provide a lens through which adults can see the unseen of patriarchy and how it hides so cleverly in plain sight in the museum's practices of representation. In this article, we use examples of how we have used the Hack as researchers and educators in various museum settings to expose, decode and disrupt the hegemonic gendered messages in the images, displays, curatorial statements, labels and even in object placement and stagecrafting. We also show how the Hack functions as a practice of 'direct agency', a means to re-write and engage with museum narratives. We argue that the Hack is an important and innovative practice because it turns museums into spaces of 'pedagogic possibility' – sites where we can learn new strategies of feminist opposition to counter the male gaze and its ability to define women's lives.

Keywords: *hack, feminist adult education, discourse analysis, visual methodologies, visual literacy, direct agency*

PREPOJENO Z ROZA IN MODRO: VIDETI NEVIDNO PATRIARHIJO S FEMINISTIČNIM MUZEJSKIM HEKOM – POVZETEK

Kot odgovor na poziv feministični kulturni teoriji, naj razvije strategije razkrinkanja patriarhije, sistema moči v srcu muzejev, ki ohranjajo problematične hierarhične binarije moškosti in ženskosti, smo oblikovale feministični muzejski hek. Ta temelji na teorijah predstav, feministični kritični diskurzivni analizi in vizualni metodologiji/pismenosti ter operira kot kritična in kreativna praksa, ki je lahko prirejena glede na muzejski kontekst. Osrednji cilj heka – metodologije in pedagogike – je omogočiti uporabo leče, skozi

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katero lahko odrasli vidijo nevidno patriarhalno in kako se patriarhija premeteno skriva v muzejskih praksah. V članku predstavljamo primere rabe heka, ki smo ga kot raziskovalke in pedagoginje uporabile v različnih muzejskih okoljih, da razkrinkamo, dekodiramo in zmotimo hegemonično ospoljena sporočila v podobah, razstavah, kuratorskih izjavah, oznakah in celo v postavitvah objektov. Pokažemo tudi, kako hek funkcionira kot praksa neposrednega delovanja, načina vnovičnega zapisa in vpletenosti v muzejske pripovedi. Zagovarjamo tezo, da je hek pomembna in inovativna praksa, saj spreminja muzeje v prostore »pedagoških možnosti« – prostore, kjer se lahko naučimo novih strategij feminističnega nasprotovanja, ki se lahko upre »moškemu pogledu« in njegovi sposobnosti, da definira ženska življenja.

Ključne besede: *hek, feministično izobraževanje odraslih, diskurzivna analiza, vizualne metodologije, vizualna pismenost, neposredno delovanje*

INTRODUCTION

Visited yearly by thousands of adults, museums and art galleries (hereafter simply 'museums') are pervasive features of our urban and rural landscapes. These institutions are such highly authoritative agents of education and knowledge creation they have socialised the public to believe that what they show and tell is always factual, objective, neutral or agenda-free. As a result, museums are the most trusted knowledge-legitimating institutions in society today and this status makes them powerful educators (e.g., Conn, 2010; Janes, 2015). Through what Whitehead (2009) calls 'practices of representation' – displays, exhibitions, objects, artworks, dioramas, curatorial and explanatory statements and labels – museums fuse together carefully constructed textual and visual narratives of what the world was, "is or should be" (Hall, Evans and Nixon, 2013, p. 127). Although different meanings can be made by adults from these diverse representational assemblages, for the most part museum representations support conventional orders of power (Bergsdottir, 2016; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). For feminist cultural theorists the 'order of power' most entrenched in museums is patriarchy, which acts as both a practice of representation and a practice hidden through representation. Using hierarchical binary oppositions operationalised through an obfuscated 'masculine gaze', particular understandings of men and masculinity and women and femininity are constructed, explained and normalised. Indeed, 'man' as central establishes a status that is taken for granted as universal and 'gender free' (Bergsdottir, 2016; Pollock, 1988; Voelkel and Henehan, 2016).

Yet, despite their problematic gender-shaping pedagogical sway, museums have been largely excluded as sites where feminist adult education and learning can take place. Plantenga (2012, p. 29), however, calls on feminist adult educators to develop new 'tools' to analyse underlying systems of power such as patriarchy "that institutionalise and manipulate identities in ways that justify oppression, discrimination and often violence". Our contribution to her toolbox is the *Feminist Museum Hack*, an adaptable, embodied pedagogical and analytical process aimed to expose, decode, disrupt and re-imagine the hegemonic fracturing gendered messages sewn into the seams of museum representations.

We begin this article with a discussion of theories of representation as knowledge-making and mobilising pedagogical practices with respect to enforcing and re-enforcing hegemonic masculinity and traditional femininity. Following this, we move to the *Feminist Museum Hack*, describing its practice and grounding its application in feminist discourse analysis, visual methodologies/literacies, and the practice of 'direct agency'. Using our own analyses as researchers as well as data collected from hacks with students in British and Canadian museums, we illustrate the potential of the *Hack* as an instrument to illuminate patriarchal obfuscations in language, image and object placement and museums as spaces of 'pedagogic possibility' – sites where we can learn to critically and creatively challenge the power of the male gaze to make our own stories. For as Ranciere (2009) reminded us, an emancipated community is one of engaged actors, narrators, and interpreters.

REPRESENTATION, SEEING AND KNOWING

For Hall, Evans and Nixon (2013), representation is one of the most powerful and productive socially constructed discursive practices of our time. To represent, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means "to describe or depict, 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" (in ibid., 2013, p. 2). As a signifying practice acting in a diversity of institutional settings, representations of visual imagery and text have an extraordinary impact on what we consider to be knowledge, to have meaning and value, and to be real or normative. Representation works as a fluid mix of framed experience, contextual information, and values and insights that provide a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. Representations are therefore not simply "the results of perception, learning and reasoning; they are also processes of perception, learning and reasoning which produce particularised results" (Whitehead, 2009, p. 9).

Carson and Pajaczkowska (2001, p. 1) believe 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". Therefore, what we see*,* and the setting of this seeing, such as the authoritative context of the museum, together play a constitutive role in shaping what becomes reality. Seeing gives organised existence to everything from history to the present, aesthetics to identity. Conversely, probing the shadows of representation, Carson and Pajaczkowska draw attention to the "complex relation between the seen and the unseen" (ibid., p. 1), where the former can act as a façade for the latter; "a means to conceal an underlying system of meaning" (ibid., p. 1). The unseen, too, shapes and mobilises knowing and meaning-making by rendering invisible the experiences of marginalized groups. Representations are neither neutral nor objective; they are ideologically driven and pedagogically intentional (Hall et al., 2013; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Marshment, 1993; Porter, 1991; Whitehead, 2009).

Nixon (2013) takes up the power of representation within a context of what he calls 'slow violence'. He argues that we need to re-think 'representationally' invisible practices of

violence, which continue unseen, yet stealthily affect the lives of the most vulnerable. Nixon positions this as a crisis of the 'unseen' and challenges us to give figurative, discernible shape to this formless, imperceptible threat. Haiven and Khasnabish (2014, p. 5) call this developing the 'radical imagination', the capacity to see and therefore, to think "critically, reflexively and innovatively". The human *l'imaginaire,* they believe, contains meanings, fixations, and effects that "circulate beneath the threshold of conscious thought" (ibid., p. 5) and, as a form of knowing, *l'imaginaire* can be mobilised to represent the world not as it is, but as it might otherwise be.

MUSEUMS AND/AS REPRESENTATION

Whitehead (2009) characterises museums as not only made up of representations – discursive constructions such as displays, exhibition labels, text panels, curatorial statements, audio-guides, videos, objects, fabric crafts, and/or artworks – but as themselves 'practices of representation', active agents of knowledge creation and meaning making. Steeds (2014) suggests representations not only regulate what we see, but often give an exalted status to what is being shown by placing discrete objects in "relation to one another through the notion of the dynamic field of vision, i.e. what the visitor sees with one gaze" (Whitehead, 2009, p. 3). Placement thus operates visually and experientially "to position the visitor within such representations" (ibid., p. 19). In other words, 'spacial plays' "have strong discursive functions in emphasising (in some cases literally spotlighting) the particular significance, centrality or relations of objects" (ibid., p. 30).

For Luke (2002), meaning making in the museum is not abstract but organised and performed "as *useful* knowledge" (p. xxi, emphasis ours). Yet we need to question whether the knowledge that museums perform is or can be what Thompson (1997, p. 23) called "really useful knowledge". Is it "political knowledge which [can] be used to challenge the relations of oppression and inequality" (ibid., p. 23)? Again, museum representations are "in no way objective" but part of the 'visualising technology' of particularised idea formations that, more often than not, support the status quo of hegemony and power (Whitehead, 2009, p. 26; see also Bergsdottir, 2016). Exhibitions in particular are active visualising technologies, "a play of forces that embrace cultural, economic and political trends… an ideal medium for influencing the public" (Steeds, 2014, p. 29). Although Steeds uses the term 'force', museums do not use physical force to make us see what they want us to see. People visit museums expecting to see important artworks, factual stories, examples of human creativity, innovation, 'accurate' historical accounts of society, culture, and even themselves (Whitehead, 2009). Museums therefore rely on what Gramsci (1971) called 'tacit consent' for their "authoritative or definitive interpretations whose legitimacy brooks no challenge" (Whitehead, 2009, p. 31). The force derives from the 'seen' and 'unseen' gendered 'representations,' and 'practices of representations,' with which museum visitors often unthinkingly, and unquestioningly, interact. Indeed, when museum 'texts' are read as expected – superficially or mediated through didactic pedagogical and visualising technologies that govern certain types of seeing, reading and

decoding – they are more likely to legitimatise problematic narratives and visuals rather than challenge them (e.g. Burnham and Kai-Kee, 2011; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007).

GENDER AND REPRESENTATION

> The 'message' is, at best, an embodiment of the aim of the exhibition. The 'code' is the medium of communication, be it text, photograph or object.
>
> Coxall, 1991, p. 85

Sexism and misogyny have become major preoccupations at this particular time in history and they are being tackled in sites ranging from the courts of justice to the military, from film to social media. Refreshingly, articles are appearing almost daily in many mainstream newspapers and on social media, exposing everything from continued wage disparities to deep acts of violence and exclusion. But Bates (2018, p. 25) reminds us in *Mysogination* that sexism is a persistent "drip, drip, drip" that seeps into our collective consciousness through pervasive representations of "pink and blue [that] promise future princesses and potential presidents, strictly delineated by gender".

Museums play a very active role in this 'drip, drip, drip' of constructing gender consciousness through a hegemony of masculinity and femininity and therefore make representation a feminist issue (Marshment, 1993). Feminist cultural theorists such as Bergsdottir (2016), Marshment (1993), Pollock (1988) and Carson and Pajaczkowska (2001) focus on the role patriarchy plays at the centre of museum representation, working as an 'epistemology of mastery' and a 'visualising technology' which is often obscured in the folds of museum narratives and images. For them, patriarchy is both an ideology of representation and an ideology embedded in the practices of representation to maintain regimes of masculinity as superior, powerful, and dominant, and femininity as fragile, inferior, and accepting (Bergsdottir, 2016; Connell, 2012). Using the 'masculine gaze,' woman becomes "image and man [becomes] the bearer of the look" (Carson and Pajaczkowska, 2001, p. 137). The 'masculine gaze' also works to essentialise, stereotype or altogether exclude women from the collective human story by placing men at the centre of historical and contemporary narratives (Bergsdottir, 2016; Porter, 1991). Mirzoeff (2013) calls this 'visuality', which he positions as a specific technique by which power visualises itself and as such, convinces or reconfirms understandings such as "creativity [as] an exclusive masculine prerogative […][,] the term artist automatically refers to man" (Pollock, 1988, p. 29). Applying a feminist lens to natural history galleries, researcher Machin (2008, p. 55) found that galleries:

> are usually regarded as places of learning and facts, of science and biological truths [there are many], androcentric biases [where] male specimens dominated female specimens with respect to number, the postures and positions [of dominance and submission] in which they were displayed, and in the quantity and style of language used in interpretative text.

Machin illustrates here how the 'unseen' masculine gaze can be read or decoded and this is where our story begins.

METHODOLOGY: THE FEMINIST MUSEUM HACK

How can we critically and creatively challenge the gendered codes concealed in the dioramas, artworks, displays, exhibitions, and texts of museums? How do we render visible the indiscernible masculine gaze and disrupt the logic of the gendered hierarchies it naturalises? How do we participate in our own learning as creators rather than as mere consumers of prescribed 'facts'? What imaginative possibilities can arise from interrogating and re-visualising how masculinities and femininities are performed through representation in museums? What pedagogical process could afford us deeper viewing, the possibilities of play, and of re-writing representations as arenas for gender concerns?

Our response to these questions as feminist educators and museum scholars is the intentional practice of teaching and researching in museums called the *Feminist Museum Hack*. To hack means to enter without authority or authorisation. Although we work from time to time with museum adult educators or curators, for the most part we are not being invited to challenge the authority of the museological masculine gaze, the problematic scripto-visual gender formations concealed in the images and explanatory labels.

The *Hack* revolves around a series of open-ended questions and engages adults in an embodied learning process of moving through the galleries and analysing what we think we see; in essence, it is about deep seeing and reading as we engulf ourselves in the images and narratives. The questions we use differ for each different museum context and genre – history, textile, human rights, virtual, war, doll, art, industrial, and photography – because each situation and way of showing is different, although there are astonishing similarities as we show below through contrasting. The aim of the questions is always, however, to intentionally provoke what hooks (2010) calls 'the oppositional gaze', a feminist gaze that is questioning, disbelieving and dissenting to function as a practice of resistance to messaging of gender identity and knowledge that hides in plain sight.

We work with students and community groups, using the questions as a guide as they move through a single gallery or exhibition. Some *Hack* questions are deceptively simple quantitative 'counting' instructions: Count how many works in this gallery are by women and by men; Count how many labels refer to women and how many to men; Count how many labels (or artworks) are about or by LGBTQ2S or non-White artists or historical figures. The majority of the questions, however, are qualitative and probe everything from the ontological framework of the museum to how people are depicted in the artworks or described by the labels. While these questions do not tell the viewer what to see, they are intentional because not only are museums clever in terms of concealment, as we have noted, but Martin (2003) believes that in an unjust world, adult educators must educate with intentionality. In addition, Mohanty (1989) believes 'strategic' critique is essential to any feminist project for revolutionary change. A consistent finding from the opening

Picture 1: Tallying Male/Female Inequality

activities of the *Hack* in which we probe participants' views of museums before we begin is that while almost all have frequented museums, few have ever seen or can name anything amiss. Comments are for the most part non-critical, confined to the 'aesthetics of art' or memories of childhood visits. If we are failing to see patriarchy at work behind what we see, then we are not only accepting these problematic gender constructions but are actually participating in their making.

For the remainder of this article, we discuss specific examples of the *Feminist Museum Hack* and what it reveals through questioning and analysis of images and words. We focus on a number of exhibitions in Canadian and English museums to show how they use visuality, relationality, stagecrafting, and language to dominate, negate and other. Whether or not this is overt or done without intention, it is nonetheless 'absorbed' as 'fact', as we noted above, and therefore, it must be unmasked. We also speak to how the *Hack* takes up the practice of 'direct agency' or creative resistance through art, defined by Mohanty (1989, p. 208) as a "conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations [through an] oppositional analytic."

VISUALITY, RELATIONALITY AND STAGECRAFTING

For Rose (2001, p. 137) problematic notions of masculinity are often produced through "discursive visuality", a specific type of "visuality that will make certain things visible in particular ways and other things unseeable [within a particular] field of vision". The *Hack* employs feminist visual methodologies because they work specifically to draw attention to this visuality in terms of how it structures images to perpetuate and naturalise masculinised notions of gender. For Rose (2001), bringing together discourse analysis with visual methodologies allows us to read and see 'inter-textually'. Discourses are articulated through all sorts of "visual and verbal images [...] and also, through the practices that those languages permit" (ibid., p. 136). "Intertextuality refers to the way that the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts" (ibid., p. 136). In more pedagogical terms, we call this 'literacy', which for Giroux (1993) and Freire (2000) is a 'practice of representation', a means to use language to question knowledge and power. Visual literacy as defined by Holloway (2012, p. 150) is the ability "to read and respond to visual images [...][,] the opportunity to make meaning from imagery with similar levels of complexities as in spoken language". Critical and feminist forms of visual literacy take a more political interrogative and questioning approach, deeply probing depictions, exploring, for example, how masculinity and femininity are being conceptualised and visualised (Bergsdottir, 2016; Carson and Pajaczkowska, 2001).

Whitehead (2009) takes us further, arguing it is insufficient to consider museum representations solely as texts and visuals without attending to meaning making from and through physical space. For Bergsdottir (2016) this means attending to the 'stagecraft' of museums, performative contextualisations such as placing, lighting and relationality to represent specific correspondences that often work, as in the case of gender, to reinforce binary oppositions and hierarchies. An example of a *Hack* question that responds to this would be: What catches your eye in displays or a gallery and why? How are women's artworks or stories positioned in relation to men's? A *Hack* question such as "What is the unifying story or narrative of the museum and how is it being told?" brings together text, visuals and 'stagecrafting' as it explores ideological and theoretical assumptions.

To discuss notions of visuality, relationality and stagecraft (Bergsdottir, 2016), we draw on our research in Canadian military museums. The hack has been adapted for this context in order to explore how war, militaries, military members, civilians, femininities, masculinities, and the enemy are pedagogically depicted. It is called a *Feminist Antimilitarist Learning Hack*, and is based on the theoretical concept of feminist antimilitarism (Enloe, 2016). It is important to recognise that these small museums (sometimes consisting of only one room), unlike national war museums, are run largely through the work of volunteers, with little funding, and the artefacts they display are often limited to those that have been donated by local people, typically brought in by family members of those who served. As such, the museums are affected by military institutional and societal norms that privilege the stories of male heroes; donations are linked to these norms in

that they tend to be about male military members who served in ostensibly heroic ways. The museums are also typically located in armouries, which are large military buildings with drill halls inside and displays of canons outside. The aim of this *Hack* is not to blame these local museums for the gendered nature of their exhibits, but to problematise them in order to facilitate change.

The questions we ask in military museums include: How is war represented? How is the military represented? How are military personnel represented? How are civilians represented? Are they men or women? Who are the protectors and who are the protected? Who is the enemy? How many of the exhibitions are about women and how many are about men? Which ones are permanent, and which are temporary? What women and men are represented (race, class, disability, sexuality)? What are they doing? How are they positioned?

Mirzoeff (2013, p. xxx) speaks of 'visuality', which he positions as a specific technique by which power "visualizes History to itself". As military museums typically produce visualities of masculine heroism, they are ideal institutions to analyse masculinities and femininities, particularly in order to problematise norms of militarised hypermasculinity. This form of masculinity is one in which men are expected to be, and are represented as, ideal heterosexual combat warriors, 'real fighters' who are dedicated to the military above all else and are willing to sacrifice themselves in order to protect fragile feminised 'others' in the name of national interest (Taber, 2009, 2018). In reality, military members perform a variety of masculinities and femininities in their service (see Higate, 2003), but militarised hypermasculinity is archetypally valued in museums.

Women are visualised in military museums as civilians, wives, mothers, nurses, and military members. Even those who are engaged in non-traditional roles are saturated in traditional feminine norms and the need for protection. On the whole, in the Canadian military museums studied to date, men are represented as white masculine military heroes (the protectors) and women as white feminine civilian wives and mothers (the protected). The former is prominently displayed ('seen') throughout the museums, as mannequins or on placards, with stories of their courage and sacrifice in relation to specific battles; their medals for courage and honour are on full display. The latter are generally hidden ('unseen') in letters, telegrams, and smaller photographs, with a focus on their connections to specific male military members. When women are more prominent they are typically included in propaganda posters about war bonds, the need to keep wartime secrets, or as 'supports' to men doing the important work of war.

There are at times exhibits dedicated to women. However, here is where we can begin to better see the act of stagecrafting as these are segregated and any complex relationship with the military is largely reduced to female mannequins dressed in military issue skirts, high heels, and make-up. An example is the PEI Regiment Museum (Charlottetown, PE) where a perusal of the exhibit on women illuminated how it was clustered in a back corner that resembled a closet. At the CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum (Victoria, BC), the exhibit opens onto the children's play area. At the Niagara Military Museum

Picture 2: Military Women Positioned with Children

(Niagara, ON), the exhibit on women focuses on the Women's Land Army, an organisation that promoted women working in agriculture to feed the war effort. This exhibit too is in a large cupboard, and includes two children's dolls, one dressed in a land army 'uniform' and another in a sailor suit. Women are therefore relationally bracketed into domesticity, into feminine roles, on the literal and figurative of what Bergsdottir (2016) would call the 'outer rims' of military service.

Women and men of colour are also problematically associated with the enemy, and therefore 'othered'. At the CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum, for example, there is a mannequin of a female radio operator with her back to the room and under a Nazi flag. At the Vancouver Island Military Museum, the story of Canada's Black Battalion is positioned next to a mannequin of a Nazi soldier and a photograph of Hitler. An exhibit about Indigenous Peoples in the war is positioned next to Japanese 'enemies' in WWII and across from the home front exhibit. When (white) women and men of colour are so sparsely represented, where they are located in relation to white men, other women, the home front, and the enemy takes on even greater importance. What "the visitor sees with one gaze" (Whitehead, 2009, p. 3) are women as connected to the enemy, as isolated from men, or as connected to the home front and to children. In the next section, we explore how language also discursively positions women and femininities in ways different from men and masculinities.

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Almost 40 years ago Spender (1980, p. x) suggested it was time to "unravel the many means by which patriarchy has been created"; in particular, she recognised the importance of language, arguing:

> Every aspect of the language from its structure to the conditions of its use must be scrutinised if we are to detect both the blatant and the subtle means by which the edifice of male supremacy has been assembled. If we are to take it apart we must be able to recognise its form. (ibid., p. 6)

For Rose (2001), discourses are in fact a form of representation that structures

> The way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it. (ibid., p. 136)

Discourse can also shape subjectivity and identity. Museums use language to maintain orders of power, yet visitors tend to look through language and not realise its power to convey ideas (Tannen, 1994).

Feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) is a foundation of the *Feminist Museum Hack*. It is a practice of analytical resistance, "a political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology" in discourse (Lazar, 2005, p. 5). Language and texts are analysed through the *Hack* for how they "sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women" (ibid., p. 6). Through our various hacks we also explore museum discursive constructions (or exclusions) of those who do not fit neat gender binaries, using gender more broadly as an interpretative category to interrogate the "imbrication of power and ideology" not otherwise apparent (ibid., p. 5). How are men and women described or constructed in the labels or curatorial statements? What types of adjectives are used, do they differ? What role are labels and texts playing? What is being stated, suggested or left out? As noted above, hegemonic patriarchal power is sustained through language – a ubiquitous medium through which ideas, ideologies and societal expectations are transmitted.

As Rose (2001) earlier noted, knowledge is discursive, 'saturated' with power and dependent on assumptions of truth. The *Hack* allows us to see how the power of language is created as truth. An analysis of curatorial statements in the Royal BC Museum's (RBCM's) *Egypt: The Time of Pharaohs* exhibit provided many examples of authoritative language use, or what Tannen (1994) has termed 'report discourse'. These curatorial or explanatory statements – like many others – do not cite a source but rather state information in irrefutable ways, e.g.,

> Egyptian men generally wear a short loincloth […][.] In the Old Kingdom, women's clothing is a simple knee-length dress made from white linen […][.] The upper classes now wear decorative garments that are pleated, gathered and laced […][.] However, singers, dancers and musicians often appear scantily clad. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

The application of the *Hack* enables us to see how museums interweave 'facts' with 'interpretations', using an authoritative voice that seems indisputable. Another example from this exhibit uses curatorial language similarly:

> In ancient Egypt, mummified animals are often placed in tombs as food or to keep the deceased company in the afterlife. They may also serve as tributes to Egyptian gods and goddesses who each have their own emblematic animal […] and demonstrate the devotion of pilgrims unable to afford statuary as an offering.

While these statements seem, on first glance, to be helpful and informative, the language uses passive voice and language that bars no discussion – "animals are often placed" – while then reverting to speculative terms such as "may also serve". These juxtapositions suggest, then, that all of the statement is 'factual'. Going further, curatorial statements do not identify gender in specific terms, but the default is consistently male. The following quotation references 'people' in ancient Egypt, but by reading using a feminist oppositional gaze, we come to see this as referencing men only:

> Like many cultures, people in ancient Egypt hope that life eternal follows death and that their burial practices keep them safe for the hereafter. Stone structures and pyramids protect the early tombs of the pharaohs. Later they are carved into the rock of the Valley of the *Kings*. After entombment, no living person is allowed access [emphasis ours].

Discursive visuality demonstrates authority, and this produces consent for a particular way of understanding the world (Mirzoeff, 2013, p. xxx). Similarly, the RSM's First Peoples Gallery describes a diorama of an Indigenous band meeting at the Qu'Appelle River, "Over the next couple of weeks, they will feast, tell stories, play games, and hunt and garden together. But first, related families sit together, exchange gifts, and smoke the Pipe." In thinking about the 'scripto-visual', the diorama itself features only male figures, so who are 'the families'? The authoritative discourses negate or absent the lives of women and deter alternative interpretations.

Whilst men are described as having agency and control, leadership skills and creating peace, an oppositional reading shows that when women are featured in an exhibit, they are often recognised only for their appearance. For example, Queen Nefertiti, described as "one of the most powerful women ever to have ruled" in ancient Egypt (see https://www.biography.com/people/nefertiti-9421166) is reduced in the RBCM exhibit to "the wife of Akhenaten" and the title of the curatorial panel is *Portrait of a Beauty*. The descriptive text is, therefore, not about Nefertiti's accomplishments, but her appearance, connection to her husband, and speculation about the artist who created the bust of this 'beauty'. The visual that accompanies the text – what Rose (2001) called 'discursive visuality' – is an image of beautiful Nefertiti, reinforcing the idea that her major contribution to Egypt was her appearance.

Juxtaposition is a commonly used literary device in museums through which two often disconnected or contradictory terms (and often terms and images) are placed together, for example dark and light, success and failure, masculinity and femininity. This device, used to highlight the contrast between two ideas by placing them in close proximity to each other, can be regularly observed in museum exhibitions. Words are juxtaposed in order to emphasise the ideological message being conveyed. For example, in the RBCM's Egyptian exhibit, a bold lettered panel describes Ramesses II as "The Great One"; in close proximity is the heading "The Divine Consort" to describe Hatshepsut (also a great leader), who was named both only in relation to her husband and described using the term 'consort', a word laden with negative and subordinate connotations.

The ever-present curatorial statements develop 'point of view' in subtle ways to identify unchallenged angles and perceptions of the message being presented, providing authoritative tone to manipulate the reader/viewer's understanding of the narrative that is offered. Coupled with (curatorial) hubris, the statements are powerful and convey their unchallengeable factualness, tending to reinforce the unassailability of the messages. This is also often coupled with the use of euphemisms to moderate language, substituting unpleasant and severe words with more 'genteel' ones in order to mediate or dismiss history's harshness – racism, colonialism and sexism to name but a few – and thus paint quite distorted pictures of events and historical figures to distil male superiority and power. In the next section, we discuss how these learnings have led to new gendered understandings.

CREATIVE DIRECT AGENCY: PRACTISING DISSENT

For Holloway (2012) and Pennisi (2008), critical visual literacy needs to be more than simply analyses of visuals and texts; it must be engagement in a creative practice of activism. Ranciere (2009) also asserts the importance of creating an empowering process that moves people away from being mere spectators towards a sense of "power to act" (ibid., p. 2). Bannerji, Carty, Delhi, Heald and McKenna (1991, p. 77) remind us that "feminism ideally rests on a transformative cognitive approach [...] and direct agency".

In the *Hack* we take this up through a variety of creative practices and direct agency. One is what we see as an interventionist and disruptive process. We use coloured post-it notes upon which we as researchers or *Hack* participants write comments and questions or create new labels. Post-it notes also capture conversations that participants have about, for example, representations as problematic visualising technologies and codes of illusion:

> A: There are no women in this exhibition.

> B: I saw a woman.

> A: Really?

> B: Well, there was a tea service and a lacy fan.

> A: You saw that as a woman?

Post-it notes are attached to display cases or beside artworks to create a visual disruption and what Marcuse (1978, p. 33) would call an "emancipatory recoding of perception". Writing alternative curatorial statements and questioning those that exist, museum hackers both take up space and take back space dominated by authoritative 'factual' language, challenging the ubiquity of the 'semantic authority' of museum texts and the hegemony of what appear to be 'facts'. When working with groups we have observed that post-it notes are often read by visitors. Some appreciate them. "Oh, you are not taking those down? They have added so much to my visit," exclaimed one woman in an art gallery in England. However, others do not appreciate our interventions and we have listened to racist or sexist diatribes by visitors and been accused of defacing the museum. While unsettling, this 'ire' allows us to explore the pervasiveness of discrimination and the depth of trust that exists in the museum's authority to narrate and imagine our lives. Conversely, 'just ire' (Freire, 2004) also comes from *Hack* participants, who suddenly begin to see what was in fact before their very eyes as this *Hack* debriefing comment articulates: "I just did not see it before. I consider myself to be very progressive and conscious. Just how did I miss this? I am very angry now with the museum but also, myself." Anger at injustice does not itself produce change but Martin (2003) and Freire (2004) believe it is where hope for change lies.

Another creative practice of dissent and resistance we use is writing poetry, particularly creating 'found poems' from the language of labels and curatorial statements or exhibition catalogues. Poetry is useful because its "political task is a visionary one, the work of making way for new worlds" (Fisher, 2009, p. 984). For Parini (2008), poetry "matters because it can waken us to realities that fall into the realm of the political" (p. xiii). Like Ranciere (2009), we too believe an emancipatory pedagogy is one where "she composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her [...]. She participates in the performance of refashioning it in her own way" (ibid., p. 13). The best way, however, to speak of poetry is through poetry, therefore we conclude with two 'found' poems that use the power of juxtaposition to take up different representations of male/female, masculinities/femininities as they were in the museum through the lens of fashion. *Ode to the Couturier* comes from explanatory statements at the Christian Dior exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto and *Ode to the Victims* from those at a feminist exhibit at the Bata Shoe Museum, Toronto.

Ode to the Couturier	**Ode to the Victims**
The bible has not taught us so much	Their worries proved to be well-founded
As this master of shape	In the decades long reign
This great conductor of form	Of notorious female fashion dictates
Who astonished the public	Cloth dipped in toxic pigments
By orchestrating away wartime masculine style	Testing positive for arsenic

To make women feel like women again	And when brushed against a flame
Clothed in 40 metres of cloth and the armour	Set instantly alight the women
Of a revival of 19th century corsetry	Imprisoned in steel corseted cages
That obscured the natural to accentuate the waist	Crafted to create criminally small waists
And enshrine femininity	And mocked mercilessly by caricaturists
As the 'new look' of peace	For their female excess and frivolity

FINAL THOUGHTS

> When I walked into the gallery I was a male, white, straight artist who hadn't recognised my privilege as much as I should. [But] the social context of class, race, gender, sexuality is very important.
>
> Hack Participant, England

Museum representations are powerful pedagogical devices that, through the seen and the unseen, influence our understandings of everything from history to ourselves, and they captured our imagination as feminist adult educators. As with the rest of society, museums suffer from denial, erasure, and dis- and misidentification. Although examples exist of progressive representations that challenge patriarchy and take up gender and other social issues, we have found, like other feminist scholars, that for the most part museum representations still tend to perpetuate binaries of masculinity and femininity. Through an all but obfuscated masculine gaze, to return to Bates (2018), they 'drip, drip, drip' through discretely coloured blue and pink narratives in which 'man' is the 'seen', "the central figure in the stories told through exhibitions and displays", and those who do not feature as important in their tales "are pushed to the less discernible outer rims" (Bergsdottir, 2016, p. 128). Museums thus continue to reconfirm that what counts as 'human' is provided by the masculine, but this gendering of culture is seldom straightforwardly visible.

Yet hooks (1992, p. 3) reminds us that "representation is a crucial location of struggle". Ulich Obrist and Raza (2015, p. 2) believe "unsatisfying conditions", such as those in museums, can act as excellent catalysts to incite "the imagination of possibility". We have taken up the 'battleground' of the museum through the *Feminist Museum Hack*. The *Hack* is an adaptable tool, which changes questions and focus to fit each museum. It is pedagogical as we engage in dialogue about patriarchy and power in society. It is methodological and analytical in that we use a feminist approach to look deeply at images and language. The *Hack* is also a creative interventionist practice that engages directly with the "frontier of the male order" by dragging it imaginatively into the open (Porter, 1991, p. 111). Finally, the *Hack* is an 'intentional' process of 'seeing', an intentional

means to cultivate an oppositional feminist gaze that can interrogate how and what we see, are able to see or allowed to see in museums and, equally, what we do not see and the implications of the 'seen' and 'unseen' for gender justice and change (Rose, 2001). As an embodied, strategic, critical visual, discursive and creatively engaged practice, the *Hack* makes an important contribution to the toolbox of feminist adult education. It is where the unthinkable, imperceptible and passive become thinkable, perceptible and actionable and that is what a pedagogy of possibility needs to look like (Manicom and Walters, 2012).

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