This is a book about adult education in the sphere of public museums and art galleries. It aims to enrich and expand dialogue and understanding amongst adult and community educators, curators, artists, directors, and cultural activists who work within and beyond the walls of these institutions. The various chapters take up the complex and interconnected pedagogics of subjectivity, identity, meaning making and interpretation, knowledge, authority, prescription, innovation, and creativity. The contributors are a combination of scholars, professors, graduate students, heritage and cultural adult educators, artists, curators and researchers from Canada, United States, Iceland, England, Scotland, Denmark, Portugal, Italy and Malta. Collectively, they challenge us to think about the dialectics of passivity and engagement, didactics and learning, gender neutrality and radicality, and neutrality and risk-taking amongst a collage of artworks and artefacts, poetry and installations, collections and exhibits, illusion and reality, curatorial practice and learning, argument and narrative, and struggle and possibility that define and shape modern day art and culture institutions. The chapters, set amongst the discursive politics of neoliberalism and patriarchy, racism and religious intolerance, institutional neutrality and tradition, capitalism and neo-colonialism, ecological devastation and social injustice, take up the spirit and ideals of the radical and feminist traditions of adult education and their emphases on cultural participation and knowledge democracy, agency and empowerment, justice and equity, intellectual growth and transformation, critical social and self reflection, activism and risk-taking, and a fundamental belief in the power of art, dialogue, reflection, ideological and social critique and imaginative learning.

Cover image: Occupy Movement at the Vancouver Art Gallery by Darlene E. Clover.
Adult Education, Museums and Art Galleries
INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Volume 20

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Adult Education, Museums and Art Galleries

Animating Social, Cultural and Institutional Change

Edited by

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SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI
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INTRODUCTION

Paradoxically, global challenges to our collective well-being are the harbinger of a new future for museums...Museums of all kinds are untapped and untested sources of ideas and knowledge...As...social institutions in civil society, museums are essential in fostering public support of decisive and immediate action to address our human predicament. (Janes, 2014, p. 405)

This edited volume is about adult education in the sphere of public museums and art galleries. Our fundamental goal is to enrich and expand dialogue and understanding between adult educators, curators, artists, and cultural activists. This book, therefore, takes up the complex and interconnected pedagogics of subjectivity and identity, meaning making and interpretation, knowledge and authority, control and influence, prescription and innovation, creativity and convention, representation and performance, passivity and involvement, didactics and learning, exclusion and inclusion, image and story. The contributors are an amalgamation of adult education scholars, university graduate students, heritage and cultural activists, artists, curators and researchers from Canada, United States, Iceland, England, Scotland, Denmark, Portugal, Italy and Malta. These authors work within the collage of artworks and artefacts, poetry and installations, collections and exhibits, illusion and reality, curatorial practice and learning, argument and narrative, struggle and possibility that define and shape modern day arts and cultural institutions. Their chapters are set amongst the discursive politics of neoliberalism and patriarchy, racism and religious intolerance, institutional neutrality and tradition, capitalism and neo-colonialism, ecological devastation and social injustice. The works also reside within the spirit and ideals of the radical and critical traditions of adult education and their emphases on cultural participation and knowledge democracy, agency and empowerment, justice and equity, intellectual growth and transformation, critical social and self reflection, activism and risk-taking, and a fundamental belief in the power of dialogue, reflection, ideological and social critique and imaginative learning.

CONTEXTUALISING THE COLLECTION: ANIMATING CONCERNS

Animating this co-created volume are inter-related challenges and concerns we have encountered as museum and art gallery professionals and artists working as
adult educators within the circles of these art and culture institutions. The first is the problematic narrowing of museum education to school programmes and curriculum goals. A result is that much of the focus within museums and art galleries, as well as training and university programmes for museum and gallery professionals and the literature on museum education, reflects this constriction. Yet nonformal adult education (workshops, lectures, seminars, community engagement activities) and informal adult education (individual self-directed activities) have been constants both within and beyond institutional walls. Activities for adults range from formal university courses to community workshops, from seminars to popular theatre, from lectures to participative video research, from art appreciation to collective art making. Some are didactic, based around the passive absorption of information. Yet others, “affected by currents of the progressive movement in adult education” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 26), aimed to contribute to political struggle and social change (e.g. Steedman, 2012). The growing socialist movements in Europe in the early 20th century believed in the pragmatic power of a cultural education to raise the status of the working class and thereby their wages (van Gent, 1992; Williams, 1958). The Workers Education Association (WEA) positioned access to culture as a means to challenge class conformity and empower workers “to refuse to know their place” (Highmore, 2010, p. 95). A cultural education for women was a crucial means to meet aspirations to move beyond the confines of domesticity (Panayotidis, 2004).

The second concern is that in general, education in museums is still seen as lacking in stature and status, which has led to divisions between pedagogical and curatorial work and concerns, and scholarship and audience. Pedagogical processes and intentions have been and often remain an afterthought to the development of exhibits, rather than embedded from the beginning as integral to their stories and arguments (e.g. Styles, 2011). In this volume, many of the authors draw attention to the problematic of this struggle between curating and pedagogy, and side step it to enable what Butler and Lehrer (2016, p. 9) call “a freedom of expression” and experimentation.

Thirdly, because public museums seem to be shielded behind a near impenetrable camouflage of hegemonic attitudes and practices – for example elitism, colonialism, racism, sexism, and Euro-centric art discourses/knowledges – critical and radical traditions of adult education have all but ignored public museums. In dismissing public museums and art galleries, adult educators overlook their provocative, pedagogical possibilities and the work of museum adult educators who too are trying – against these many odds – to innovate and enrich the public sphere and challenge problematic institutional conventions. What we illustrate in this book is that museums are as fraught with problems and dysfunctions as they are with creative and political potential. On one hand, museums are filled with controversial and problematic collections and exhibits that Peter Mayo (2012) argues can “appeal to one’s sense of criticality” (p. 103). Collections and framings that perpetuate racism, imperialism or sexism can serve as excellent dialogic and visual platforms
to encourage critical consciousness and robust debate that can re-shape museums as well as problematic pedagogical ‘disciplinary regimes’, as the chapter in this volume by de Oliveira Jayme and his colleagues illustrate through the process of ‘museum hacking’. On the other hand, Herbert Marcuse (1978) reminded us that within all creative practice there is resistance. Museums house ‘disobedient objects’ and activist arts that “critique and negate the existing social order by the power of their form” (Miles, 2012, p. 4). These aesthetic and storytelling resources provide exciting spaces for new insights into past and present conditions of the world to stimulate the ‘radical imagination’, the ability “to re-imagine society not as it is but as it might otherwise be” (Havien & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 3). Without the subjective factor of human imagination (as in the imagination of another world), there is little prospect for radical political change even when objective factors (such as are provided by technology) are present” (Miles, 2012, p. 12). What we show through this volume is that although museum arts and stories do not change the world, they have “indirect agency for change [as] liminal zones of criticality…and positive dreaming” (p. 12). This was reflected in Freire’s work – and is now taken up by contemporary arts-based adult educators – to heighten critical consciousness, to understand how our lives and worlds are constructed, such as by gender, the central issue of Section Two of this volume, through the power of art. Collins (1998) argues it is folly to disassociate critical pedagogical work from our aesthetic dimensions and creative urges as these “add meaning to the politics and theory of an emancipatory practice” (p. 113).

Finally, Janes (2015) argues that museums are at a “metaphorical watershed” (p. 149), the cusp of great potential to become agents of socio-ecological change. To do so, they must “re-arrange their worldviews” (p. 149), which we suggest in this volume includes rethinking their public pedagogical work and the nature of its impact on society. How do we respond actively and imaginatively to the cascade of social, cultural and environmental problems brought about by rampant capitalism, unbridled neoliberalism and what poet Patrick Lane (2016) calls the traps the current ‘culture of fear’ has set for us, and the traps we then set for ourselves? Marching intentionally into this fray are Indigenous peoples, artists, and other frequently marginalised community members and groups who together, have become what Janes (2015, p. 48) calls a “citizen’s chorus” that works to expand the civic and pedagogical purpose and promise of these most ubiquitous, demanding, frustrating, creative and resourceful of spaces. If culture is indeed a space where we can learn new things, where our perceptions can be radically challenged and our imaginations actively engaged, as Marcuse (1978), Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (2001), Max Wyman (2004) and Raymond Williams (1958) believed, then the museums of today are significant. The more adult educators can weave themselves into and support the work of arts and cultural institutions, the greater their ability will be to shape themselves into vital cultural places of encounter that encourage intellectual growth, consciousness, justice, creativity and even activism.
MUSEUMS: ILLUSION, REALITY AND POSSIBILITY

At a talk at the University of Toronto a number of years ago, Canadian author Marlene Nourbese-Philip argued poetically that culture was not an insignificant site of struggle, but that its power resided in masking that very fact. The accuracy and poignancy of this statement is perhaps most apparent within the complex, contradictory worlds of public museums and art galleries. Equally useful to understanding the intricacy and contrary nature of these institutions is Mary Pratt’s (1991) idea of the ‘contact zone’. In her studies of early colonial expeditions in Latin American, Pratt conceptualised ‘contact zones’ as spaces where diverse cultures meet, clash and struggle, “often as highly asymmetrical relations of [domination], such as colonialism…or their aftermaths as they are [still] lived out in many parts of the world today” (p. 1). These zones were marked by differences of power, and were the sites where knowledge and other cultural attributes were appropriated to enhance the privilege, status, and wealth of the colonisers. Yet Foucault (1980) reminded us power was never located solely in one place or held by a single group. Pratt (1991) too recognised colonial encounters as complex and contradictory, knots of conflict as well as collaborative interaction. Contact zones could be spaces of exchange, actions and transactions undertaken in a spirit of reciprocity. They could be spaces of collective meaning making, with the potential for debate, knowledge co-creation, resistance, and a praxis of social and self-reflexivity.

As contact zones, public museums and art galleries can present a façade of motionlessness, passivity and indifference, yet they can also actively shape “our most basic assumptions about the past and about ourselves” (Marstine, 2006, p. 1). Museums and galleries suggest impartiality, objectivity and “detachment from real world politics” (Phillips, 2012, p. 17) when in fact politics has been a constant interruption to their “imagined sanctity” (Macdonald, 1998, p. 178). Our sense is that these establishments are places where once vibrant artworks and artefacts go to die (Flood & Grindon, 2014) but at the same time exhibitions can be seen as active storytellers, and “the telling of stories calls forth further stories” (Husbands, 1996, p. 51). Art and cultural institutions suggest an unconditional bias toward prevailing forces of social power through highly selective representational practices, but there have always been ruptures through experimentations, and a questioning of their own assumptions about “cultural production and knowledge” (Macdonald, 1998, p. 176; see also Perry & Cunningham, 1999). Just as masculinities and patriarchal power and control seem the only characterisations available to us, we are reminded that women make up the bulk of museum visitors, their paid and unpaid workforce, and thus have never merely suffered silently in subjugation (e.g. Bell, Clover, & Sanford, 2015; Deepwell, 2006; Golding, 2013; Levin, 2010). Through their extraordinary cleansing powers, art and cultural institutions seem to remove all traces of the ugly stories of social and cultural conflict and injustice, yet neither internal nor external forces have allowed them to escape fully their complicity and culpability in these vanishing acts (Gregory & Witcomb, 2007; Janes, 2015). Whilst museums and
INTRODUCTION

art galleries appear “to concentrate on certainty and dogma, thereby forsaking the function of stimulating legitimate doubt and thoughtful discussion” (Casey, 2007, p. 293), exhibitions have shocked audiences out of trance-like passivity and caused intense public outrage and broad debate (e.g. Golding & Modest, 2013; Janes, 2009; Phillips, 2011). Although preservation and conservation act like primary mandates, by their own admission, museums are first and foremost pedagogical institutions, providing a plethora of adult education opportunities (Clover, Sanford, & de Oliveira Jayme, 2010; UNESCO, 1997). And when didactic, highly controlled pedagogical practices look to be cemented into place, self-reflexive interventions shake authoritative conventions to their very core (Clover, 2015; Sternfeld, 2013).

What this tells us is that since their inception, the intellectual, pedagogical, creative and storied work of museums has been anything but straightforward. These are contested sites with no singular, hegemonic reality, no actual time free from a barrage of competing mandates, visions and imaginings of their place and role in the world (Janes, 2015; Hooper-Greenhill, 2001; Perry & Cunningham, 1999). Time and again, these institutions have had to respond to the ‘hard questions’ about their relevance, their responsibility to local community and to society, their insistence on neutrality, the legitimacy of their omissions, and thus their potential as adult education institutions in a very ‘troubled world’ (Hooper-Greenhill, 2001; Janes, 2009).

ADULT EDUCATION AND LEARNING: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

The notion of “pedagogies of possibility” holds a double meaning...the first suggests a grounded and pragmatic assessment of what is feasible [to change]. The second connotation of ‘possibility’ refers to that which is yet to be imagined, that 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. (Linzi Manicom & Shirley Walters, 2012, p. 4)

As the theory and practice of adult education is central to this volume, it is important to clarify what it actually means in this context. When people think of adult education, the visions that come most frequently to mind include skills upgrading, vocational training, adult basic education, adult literacy classes, or night classes through continuing studies or extra-mural divisions of universities. Many are also familiar with terms such as ‘adult learning’ and ‘lifelong learning’, conceptions that recognise learning as ubiquitous and occurring throughout one’s lifetime. All of these forms and ideas are important, but they are only one side of the complex field that is adult education.

What underpins this book are the more critical and radical traditions of adult education. Terms used to denote these traditions of social pedagogical praxis include feminist adult education, anti-racist education, decolonising
practice/methodologies, critical and public pedagogy, transformative and radical learning, arts-based adult education, social movement learning, environmental adult education, popular education and citizenship education to name but a few. These terms allow adult educators to pay attention at needed times to particular sites of education and learning such as social movements, to particular populations such as women, to particular creative practices such as arts and exhibitions, or to particular social issues such as colonisation.

There is no one definition of the radical and critical traditions of adult education, so these are best understood through their positioning and purposes. Adult educators who work in these critical traditions share a commitment to the social purpose of the field, with its baseline values of justice, equity, transformation and change. They use adult education practices, spaces and strategies to promote knowledge democracy, sometimes referred to as different ways of knowing, critical and imaginative thinking, critical discovery and experimentation, collectivity of purpose, and equality of being. Adult education becomes a call to action to develop an active and engaged citizenry with agency to shape their own learning, lives, communities, societies, and the world. Pedagogical processes intentionally disrupt, interrogate, challenge, deconstruct, render visible and decolonise how we understand the world and each other, in the interests of positive, radical, social, cultural, political, economic and even institutional change. Adult education is both dependent upon, but also aims to transform, institutions located in the intersections and interstices between the state and social movements such as museums and art galleries that ‘perform’ pedagogically and thereby have a major impact on society (e.g. Crowther, Martin, & Shaw, 1999; Mayo, 2012).

Central to these traditions of adult education are processes that stimulate dialogue and questioning, listening and embodied learning, investigation and meaning making, creativity and the radical imagination, and critical self and social reflection. The new knowledge and understandings generated through these processes, be they through conversations or art-making, aim to lead to deeper questioning about power and ideology, clearer analyses of the nature of inequality, exploitation and oppression and the often hidden practices and structures that create and maintain these inequities. Adult educational activities and strategies deliberately expose how these “ideological systems and societal structures hinder or impede the fullest development of humankind’s collective potential” by limiting and circumscribing what people feel is possible to achieve or to change (Welton, 1995, p. 14).

Using Angela McRobbie’s (2009) idea of ‘pedagogic contact zones’, adult education can be understood as a ‘zone’ for ‘difficult conversations’. By this we mean social knowledge is co-created, defiance nurtured, imagination unleashed, risk-taking encouraged, and identity reconceptualised. Adult educators are never passive in this process, but nor are they authoritarian. They are not mere facilitators, but rather work with ‘intentionality’ to balance respect for existing knowledge whilst challenging problematic assumptions, to encourage speaking but equally, authentic
listening, and to introduce difficult and controversial topics yet tempering these through art or humour. Growth and change comes from the paradoxes, discomfort and disturbances but equally, from acknowledgement, respect and fun. Intentionality is critical because social, cultural, economic or gender justice and change do not simply happen by chance. “Individuals and communities can and do come to develop more critical understandings of their situations”, as Marjorie Mayo (2012) reminded us, but given that the very existence of planet earth and global civilisation is in turmoil and danger, adult education in public museums and art galleries must step forward and contribute to the intelligent and caring change this troubled world requires (Janes, 2015). They must show that another world is indeed possible. And this is where our book begins.

SECTION ONE: ACTIVISM, SUBVERSION AND RADICAL PRACTICE

If museums can start substantive discussions with society and keep them going, by providing alternative views of complex things with frankness and integrity, museums will be able to adapt and reinvent themselves for [this] new century. (Robert Janes, 2015, p. 299)

In Chapter One of this first section, Robin Grenier and Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson take us to Iceland, amidst the debris of the storm of the 2008 global financial collapse. Framing this event as a ‘disorientating dilemma’, the authors introduce us to Shut up and be quiet!, an exhibit curated by the District Culture Centre in Húsavík that challenged political indifference and citizen silencing as it captured heated public discussion and debate around the impact of the economic crisis. As the authors reveal how the exhibition was received within the community, and how it was taken up through a network of exhibits regionally and nationally, they provide a strong case for museums to act as public spaces for critical dialogue, debate, reflection, and participation. The exhibitions brought the dissenting voices of Icelanders to Icelanders in a nation traditionally known for keeping ‘quiet’. The authors present a powerful vision of museums’ roles in constructing active citizenship, changing discourse around dissent and protest, and working pedagogically to promote social justice and transformation.

From Iceland we move to Scotland, specifically to St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow. Clare Gray argues in the chapter that it is essential for communities to have spaces to explore together controversial issues, and that museums have a duty to be these spaces. However, she also acknowledges that if museum educators are going to provoke difficult conversations amongst religious and political groupings with timeless animosities, they must have the adult education skills that will enable them to deal with these highly explosive and emotive issues. She therefore shares ideas to help educators enter the fray of radical dialogue for change. These include balancing planning with flexibility, allowing for spontaneity, looking for commonalities without dismissing differences, and dealing with silences
Continuing in Scotland, in Chapter Three adult educator Jean Barr examines how contemporary museums can transcend elitist and selective histories to become ‘archives of the commons’ and spaces of critical cultural adult education and culture studies. She presents examples of contemporary lens-based artworks from Sierra, Sikula, Biemann and Fowler, characterising these as ‘archival impulses’ that act as historical agents in the here and now and portals between an unfinished past and a re-opened future. For Barr, the practice of exposing different audiences to alternative archives of public culture challenges the privately funded ‘design-and-display’ culture of the art world and protests any idea that adult education and contemporary art should be reduced to commodified products that support capitalist economies. She argues for collaboration and blending of skills between adult educators and museums towards a project of cultural, political and educational reframing to reimagine often forgotten possible political futures.

In Chapter Four, British art gallery educator Paul Stewart presents examples of artist-led projects in and beyond galleries. He takes exception to trends that view learning as a “commodity product” and posits an alternative view – that gallery spaces can be sites of collective, critical and transformative learning. Drawing from various theorists, Stewart examines the crucial role of the artist-curator in the creation of critical-creative spaces of learning for social change. He uses examples of gallery/art education to theorise an ‘emo-active turn’ that includes imaginative experimentations of artists engaging politically through art practices in diverse museological contexts. The author argues as well for new learning commitments between educators and learners as he advocates for aesthetic-pedagogical practices that ‘disfigure’ commonly accepted ideals, expand the walls of galleries, and create shifts in both the art world and in wider society.

Avner Segall and Brenda Trofanenko of Canada and the United States suggest, in the final chapter of this section, the idea of museums as sole proprietors of knowledge needs to give way to notions of ‘deliberative democracy’ where the public are seen as ‘civic agents’. By way of example, Segall and Trofanenko look to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London and examine how it has worked continuously to change its identity, purpose and educational aims to transform traditional hierarchical relationships with its audience. They illustrate how the V&A museum’s educational imperative, expressed through its spatial arrangements, forms of display, and structured juxtapositions, works to subvert its historically determined imperial mission and shift the power relations away from established didactic authority toward active participation, co-curatorship, and co-interpretations that invite the public to play within the institution and challenge existing conceptions of knowledge and knowing.
In the first chapter in Section Two, Darlene E. Clover and Kathy Sanford argue that if museums and art galleries can tackle other difficult social issues, then addressing sexism, one of society’s most pressing problems, should be central to their work. They acknowledge, however, that obstacles exist by sketching out the problematic historical gendered terrain of public museums. Yet they note how, despite the sexism, women have contributed actively to the founding, growth and development of museums and art galleries in variety of significant areas and ways. Bringing us to the present, the authors share findings from conversations with museum adult educators, curators and community practitioners in Canada, England and Scotland, highlighting troubling misunderstandings and framings of feminism, coupled with essentialist feminised notions of ‘educators’ that contribute to marginalisation. But, as nothing is ever this straightforward in the museum world, they highlight examples of important feminist adult education processes that need recognition, support and further study.

In Chapter Seven, adult educators Micki Voelkel and Shelli Henehan apply a feminist lens to the ‘master narrative’ of the lives of the madams and prostitutes at Miss Laura’s Social Club, a museum located in Fort Smith, Arkansas, United States. They highlight problematic framings that suggest an idealised Old West rather than reality. The authors challenge the positioning of Miss Laura’s as a ‘cathouse’ of ‘Cinderellas’ on a path to respectability and ask difficult questions about but why women were there in the first place, and the humiliation of monthly health inspections. Equally absent from exhibits and stories are demands by customers, the repulsive smells and the drugs. In the sanctity of neoliberal tourism, the museum promotes prostitution as healthy and safe, never calls into question how it perpetuate patriarchy, and ultimately, silences the very women it claims to represent.

Next, Rachel Clarke and Rosie Lewis take us to the North East of England, to a university-museum partnership heritage project that focused on the cultural, social and political contributions of four generations, or 70 years, of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) women. The authors illustrate how the project educated women in oral and material research, digital design, herstorical education, enquiry-based learning, digital media training, and archiving their ‘herstories’. The authors advocate for transformational approaches to adult education that promote critical engagement and co-production to enable women’s active participation and empowerment in telling their own stories and challenging heritage narratives that absented and eradicated their contributions to the region.
In Chapter Nine, Emília Ferreira of Portugal invites us into her work and struggles as a feminist art educator in Casa da Cerca. She begins by illustrating the introduction of new approaches to bringing scientific, social, historic and artistic data to broader audiences. She argues that this demonstrates Casa da Cerca can work in clear, critical, intellectual, fun and inclusive ways. She then introduces us to how she applies a feminist analysis to the interpretation of artworks, and works to ensure that women’s art is not feminised and made marginal. But she acknowledges that there gender complexities still exist around contemporary art, questions the historical gendered status quo and blindness of the institution, and suggests there is much work to be done to reach gender parity and justice.

In the final chapter in this section, artist-activist-adult educator Jennifer Van de Pol uses two projects to illustrate how she is weaving together pedagogically feminist and decolonial theories and practices at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Canada. The first example, Performing Femininity, used theatre set amongst the works of exhibition entitled *The Artist Herself: Self-Portraits by Canadian Historical Women Artists* followed by a workshop to make indigenous cornhusk dolls set in the old colonial mansion part of the gallery, and facilitated by a feminist Iroquois and Mohawk artist. The author discusses how the paradox of the settings, and the pairing of the theatre and doll-making activities gave the women opportunities to consider the multiplicity of ways they create and embody stories of self, gender and identity. The second project, Activating Emily, uses artist Emily Carr’s work and notoriety as a jumping off point to again consider the larger socio-political, feminist and decolonial contexts.

**SECTION THREE: RE-IMAGINING, REPRESENTING, REMAKING**

*As activist educators with an intentional perspective, we see our work in organisations as ever more urgent, given how profoundly it is shaped by the global context. We live in a world made unequal by centuries of empire and colonialism.* (Tina Lopes & Barb Thomas, 2006, p. 1)

Opening the third section of this volume, Kay Johnson reflects on a learning journey she undertook to a Musqueam First Nation collaborative exhibition in the city of Vancouver, British Columbia to illustrate how museums can be important sites for the settler education required to overcome colonialism. Acknowledging the troubled histories between museums and Indigenous peoples in Canada, she takes us on a learning journey through the *čəsnaʔəm, the city before the city* exhibition, illustrating how it works intentionally as a form of critical public pedagogy to disrupt and overturn traditional colonialist museological discourses and display practices, opening up opportunities for the public to critically question their own settler assumptions and understanding of the Indigenous identity of the place now called Vancouver. At the heart of Johnson’s journey lie issues of identity, place, and
Beginning with haunting images and stories of lynching, indifference and voyeurism, Lisa R. Merriweather, Heather Coffey and Paul G. Fitchett focus in their chapter on the value of museums that opt to be sites of counter ‘narratological public pedagogy’, a blending of formal and nonformal education and learning. Arguing that the horrific racist past should never be ignored or sanitised to salve America’s conscience, the authors explore how they used a museum to provide history pre-service teacher education students with opportunities to confront the unfamiliar and disturbing narratives of racism in the US, to examine their own storied existences and to make connections within this context of disparate and conflicting events, identities and emotions. While they recognise that counter-narratives can contribute to a sense of ‘unknowing of self’ they argue that re-storying processes can lead to a deeper sense of knowing others and expand the perimeters of how history lessons can be taught.

Continuing the theme of ‘dark representations’, Jennifer Thivierge takes us to the sphere of war museums, and specifically the Canadian War Museum. She acknowledges a problematic tendency to rely on stories of young men and boys marching bravely off to war, and images of tanks and guns, but argues war museums are much more complex pedagogical and engagement sites. She discusses how groups of ‘publics’ are engaged before and after exhibitions, and the problematic and positive aspects of this. *Bomber Command*, for example, was an exhibit that saw veterans pitted against educators and curators who attempted to depict counter stories of ally bombings at the end of the Second World War. She then introduces a Peace Exhibition, which although dismissed by some as mollifying and propagandist, challenged normative representations of war by using personal items such as a beret, and stories that actively engaged the public as agents in imagining a world without conflict and violence.

In their chapter, Laura Formenti and Alessia Vitale of Italy take us from narration to poïesis. They introduce us to the *Life(St)Art* project, an innovative alliance between a university and a museum that acted as a transformative practice of poïetic pedagogy. The Lab’Os workshops begin by asking students of adult education to become researchers of their experience by engaging them in processes of self-narration/identity-making, poetry and metaphor, and active conversation. Workshops also used the works of Keifer to foster reflexivity about the complexity of life and issues of uncertainty. The authors argue that projects such as this challenge more normative cognitive practices of adult learning in universities by using the power of art to inspire new ideas for teaching adults and to take up the difficult questions of who we are in more holistic ways.

In the final chapter of this section we go another journey, this time with Sandro Debono who is in the process of imagining an intentional ‘fine art’ museum – MUŻA – that will respond critically and creatively to the divisive issue of migration.
affecting Malta today. Arguing that Malta has always been a frontier country of immigrants and colonisers from Europe, the Middle East and Africa, he discusses how he envisions MUŻA as a site of new interpretation strategies grounded in critical pedagogical theory to promote critical visual literacy. To illustrate what this will look like in the future, Debono draws attention to use of past exhibitions that creatively interrupted negative assumptions about ‘migration’ by illustrating and presenting Maltese as ‘migrants’. This chapter also emphasises the potential of this new type of museum experience to inform art history narratives, as the author revisits what counts as aesthetic measurement within a context of promoting social equality at individual and community levels.

SECTION FOUR: PERFORMING, INTERVENING, DECONSTRUCTING

When, for instance, one adopts the position of the educator one adopts a position of power that can easily be used to reproduce and strengthen existing divisions and relationships between positions in the educational setting... But to ‘empower’ is to give all participants – including the educator – possibilities of informed choices by exposing, discussing and trying different positionings and possibilities. (Helene Illeris, 2006, p. 23)

Darlene E. Clover and Emily Stone of Canada and England respectively begin the final section of this book. They explore a non-formal adult learning course offered at Tate Modern in London, analysing its effectiveness in helping participants to think critically about ‘slow violence’, defined as the aftermath of war and violence. The six-week course included various works of art, installations, academic readings and an informal dialogue space at a local pub. The authors discuss the tensions and challenges in the course around subject knowledge, authority of knowledge, and working pedagogically with a very diverse group. They highlight the importance of the informal space as a site of active engagement and discussion, and the power of the artworks to render visible, and to stimulate questioning about the ideologies behind the complex and contentious, yet near ‘invisible’ effects of problems. To be more powerful, nonformal courses should be co-taught by adult educators and content/art specialists.

Alyssa Greenberg’s chapter provides a different segue in to often, invisible societal power structures. Her central argument is that when developing community-engaged exhibits, community partners need to be given the same level of involvement and voice as the museum educators. She raises issues of equity when involving community members, often who are working low-paid jobs, and the need to be mindful of their particular circumstances and obligations. Through an exhibition focused on historical and contemporary domestic work, Greenberg suggests that the valuing of different types of knowledge is essential to community partnership building and popular education, but also identifies challenges to equitable engagement in
such work – as museum educators disrupt the status quo in exhibits, power inequities between partners must be considered and addressed.

‘Museum hacking’, the subject of the next chapter by Bruno de Oliveira Jayme, Kim Gough, Kathy Sanford, David Monk, Kristin Mimick and Chris O’Connor, is explored as a disruptive practice developed by a group of teacher and museum educators that provided teacher candidates with the opportunity to examine critically, museum exhibits and provide a space of response to their examinations. Over four museum visits, the teacher candidates were guided to examine hegemonic ideologies represented in museum exhibits and to challenge these ideologies through creating their own alternative exhibits. The authors planned a series of nonformal educational encounters that lead to public interventions, enabling participants to see the museum as both a site of maintenance of dominant discourses as well as offering the potential to challenge and disrupt. They position the museum hacking event as a means of civic and political sense making, to explore more deeply and creatively, issues of justice, equity and learner/audience participation in museum-making.

Helene Illeris chapter offers a discussion of adult education and learning as transformation, based in a concept of the learner and the object of knowing as inextricable elements of a practice-based ontology. She argues that what transforms is not the individual learner but the practice in which she or he takes part, where the learning signifies a potential for transformation from the known to the unknown. Illeris suggests that to provide opposition to the neoliberalisation and colonisation of our perceptions of what it means to be human, we need to begin with an awareness of the ontological foundations of our conceptions of transformation. Illeris offers Tate’s Open Studio, a series of dynamic and participative environments where people are invited to engage directly with artists’ practice and experiment as they wish, as an example of ways in which alternative conceptions of learning are being enacted for adult learners wanting to engage in spaces of social criticism and change making.

We give the final word in this volume to Bryan Smith, whose chapter provides a critical examination of technological ‘innovations’ (QR codes) intended to enable more engaged learning for museum visitors. Using a project that attempted to utilise QR codes as an example, Smith questions whether digital technologies can be seen as the best future to connect adults and museum experience and explores the obstacles to integrating technologies into educational experiences for adult learners. Smith argues that the limited success of QR codes in museums needs to be understood in light of all future implementation of new technologies, particularly consideration of the educational reasons for developing these in the first place. Although technologies are now a ubiquitous part of today’s world, and museums have a unique opportunity to lead the way in technology-supported adult education, they need to determine how these technologies can best be utilised and not just engage in technology for technology’s sake.
REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

SECTION 1

ACTIVISM, SUBVERSION AND
RADICAL PRACTICE
ROBIN S. GRENIER AND
SIGURJÓN BALDUR HAFSTEINSSON

1. SHUT UP AND BE QUIET!

Icelandic Museums' Promotion of Critical Public Pedagogy
and the 2008 Financial Crisis

INTRODUCTION

Shut up and be quiet! It is a statement that, although not always expressed in those exact words, is heard by many museums—maybe from policy makers who want museums to display passively the art of centuries ago without commentary or challenge, or from the community or staff who may assume the museum is there simply to show history from traditional and dominant voices, or from visitors that expect an exhibit to provide entertainment or shallow distraction, meaning it does not challenge them to think or act. But, with courage and conviction, museums can embrace this statement and turn it into a powerful commentary that is a pedagogical force for change and social justice.

The exhibition entitled *Shut Up and Be Quiet! (Haltu Kjafti og Vertu Þæg)* opened at the District Culture Centre in Húsavík, North Iceland in January, 2009. The exhibition explored public discussions taking place in Iceland after October 6, 2008—the official start date of the financial crisis that plagued not only Iceland, but also the world. Through the display of blogs, documentary and photo-shopped photographs, protest artefacts, and other objects the exhibition revealed the heated opinions of the general public. In doing so this small museum sought to be relevant to the people in the region, and as the crisis affected the entire nation, to make itself relevant on a national level. This broke with the tradition that had hitherto been practised in museums outside the capital, Reykjavik, one that focused on regional issues rather than national ones. The exhibit caused great debate, dissent from people in the community, and interest that led to a similar installation at the National Museum of Iceland. By detailing the exhibition and its effect on visitors and the larger museum community, this chapter explores critical perspectives on adult learning that encourage dialogue, social justice, and the challenging of political and social norms, thus shedding light on international views of participative museum practices.
To begin examining the effect of *Shut Up and Be Quiet!* on museum visitors and on the political discourse in Iceland, we first define public pedagogy and, related to that, social movement learning.

**Critical Public Pedagogy**

The 1990s gave rise to the concept of public pedagogy; first through the works of feminist researchers such as Carmen Luke (1996) and later with the work of Henry Giroux (2003, 2004). Although there are numerous approaches for delineating forms of pedagogy in this context (see Burdick & Sandlin, 2013), Sandlin, Schultz, and Burdick (2010) describe public pedagogy in general as processes, types, and sites of education and learning occurring outside formal educational institutions. This includes popular culture and media, public spaces and cultural institutions, prevailing discourses such as public policy, and public intellectualism and social activism. The growing importance of public pedagogies in the study of adult education is due in part because it is, “in and through these spaces of learning that our identities are formed [as we interact] with popular and media culture as well as with cultural institutions such as museums” (Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011, p. 5). With respect to museums, public pedagogy emphasises how these sites do not simply impose meaning or the ‘right answer’ on visitors but instead can create reflective spaces for addressing what Mezirow (1998) called shared disorienting dilemmas. Public pedagogy also understands museums as ‘transitional spaces’ that challenge individuals to face the ambivalences that result from encounters with diversity (Biesta, 2004; Ellsworth, 2005; Masschelein, 2010).

**Social Movement Learning**

Adult education has from its inception included the need to focus on, and expand democracy in, society (Edelson, 1999; Roy, 2014) by helping people to feel they are able to more fully participate and have access to information and ideas in order to make decisions (Brookfield & Holst, 2011). This practice is rooted in social justice, “the right of every individual to have civil rights and equitable treatment without class distinction” (Russo, 2014, p. 149). It calls for ideas of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalisation and exclusionary processes (Gewirtz, 1998) and is exemplified through social movement learning.

Social movements are oppositional in nature and defined as “voluntary associations of people and organisations within civil society that rise and fall in response to particular social, economic, ideological, and political changes and issues often driven by the state or the market” (Walters, 2005, p. 54). Social movements can be broken down into Old Social Movements (OSM), typified by the unjust
distribution of resources and class struggles (Buechler, 1995) and New Social Movements (NSM) centred on “direct democracy, spontaneity, non-hierarchical structures, and small-scale, decentralised organisations” (D’Anieri, Ernst, & Kier, 1990, p. 447). NSMs include movements that seek social change through alteration to lifestyle, knowledge or cultural practices, address environmental or food issues (Buechler, 1995; Flowers & Swan, 2011), or work towards simplicity (Sandlin & Walther, 2009). Whether new or old, social movements have been described as simultaneously acting as bearers and producers of knowledge (Chesters & Welsh, 2011). This knowledge is an outcome of social movement learning, which was introduced in 1980 by Paulston in relation to Scandinavian folk colleges and includes an external dimension whereby society at large learns about issues raised by social movements and an internal dimension whereby individuals in the movement learn (see Duguid, Mündel, & Schugurensky, 2007). Gorman (2007) suggests that social movement learning challenges more traditional notions of autonomous, and often competitive, learning. He calls for a move toward the collective nature of learning found in social movements that confront the status quo. This can occur informally, such as taking part in political protests or through formal training, such as education given to volunteer election monitors (Hall & Clover, 2005). Although these are well-established examples, it should be noted that the definition of social movement learning is malleable, and largely shaped by context (English & Mayo, 2012; Kapoor, 2008; Walters, 2005).

Regardless of the form it takes, a key component of social movement learning is finding ways to bring people together, frequently made more difficult by the “social and technological developments that force us further and further apart into a chaotic assemblage of fractured individual existences” (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, p. 199). One site for combating such conditions is the museum. Museums can act as sites where alternative information can be shared, and collaboration and engagement are fostered to build solidarity. These cultural institutions can also facilitate dialogues through their exhibitions and social movement learning events that require adults to engage effectively in an active and equal dialogue with those in positions of power (Russo, 2014). Lopes and Thomas (2006) call on adult educators to create pedagogical spaces that render visible privilege and its ramifications within all aspects of society, but also to take up these difficult issues with elite or what they call ‘protected’ classes.

Museums are one answer to such a demand. Although the adoption of such a mission and educational identity by museums is slow, pressure is growing to establish the museum as a “unique place in civil society to further the cause of social change” (Clover, 2015, p. 301). In the case that follows, a museum takes up social movement learning and provides a counter to the lack of understanding by some adult educators who many argue do not fully understand the value of museums and their exhibitions as spaces for ideology critique and critical public pedagogy (Borg & Mayo, 2010; Grek, 2009; Styles, 2011).
In the early 1990s Iceland became a laboratory for neoliberal politics that aimed at restructuring Icelandic society to improve governmental roles, amplify public living standards, and partake in the global economy. The Icelandic government privatised previously state-owned institutions such as banks, deregulated laws on the financial sector and the energy system, reduced taxes, and privatised access to environmental resources (such as fishing waters). That development abruptly halted on October 6, 2008 when the Prime Minister addressed the nation on State Television, announcing that the world’s banking system was facing a major economic crisis that had deeply affected Icelandic banks and society. He stated, “The Icelandic banks have not escaped this banking crisis any more than other international banks and their position is now very serious. In recent years the growth and profitability of the Icelandic banks has been like something akin to a fairy tale. Major opportunities arose when the access to capital on foreign money markets reached its peak, and the banks together with other Icelandic companies, exploited these opportunities to launch into new markets” (Financial Crisis, n.d., para. 3). Almost overnight, Iceland’s three major private banks had collapsed and were taken over by the government (Danielsson & Zoega, 2009). In the address the Prime Minister concluded with the words, “God bless Iceland,” underlining the gravity of the situation for the Icelandic economy and the uncertainty that lay ahead for the government of Iceland to resolve the situation. Not long after, unemployment rose to unprecedented levels and the public was hit hard by property foreclosure and debts incurred by devalued currency. In the course of the crisis, social and other media outlets overflowed with public outrage, condemnation, humour, irony, and paranoia about the situation. Questions arose about responsibility for the situation and led to public protests, which were directed mainly towards governmental officials, business tycoons, privatised banks, and the Central Bank. The protests were mainly confined within Reykjavík, but they were also organised in other places.

In Reykjavík, smart phones and social media, such as Facebook, became platforms for coordination and recruitment of protestors. Along with community meetings and speeches, rallies had some Icelanders holding signs and banners, while others banged on pots and pans or oil barrels with kitchen utensils (Figure 1). Bonfires were lit and other visual and acoustic signs were used on protest sites to convey the public’s growing criticism and concern. Some protesters concealed their faces at such gatherings and, at times, crowds of people breached barriers that law enforcement authorities had created around the Parliament and other venues leading to violence, arrests, and prosecution on behalf of the State. Smaller protests took place to the north in Akureyri, and in Selfoss, horse feces were thrown in the lobby of the town bank, Landsbankinn. Yet for Iceland, the protest and public upheaval was unusual. Historically, Icelanders rarely resorted to
SHUT UP AND BE QUIET!

public protest and usually abided by official rules and regulations. The force of the public outcry and the wave of protests was a paradigm shift in public expression and many in power found it unsettling. In January 2008, Fréttablaðið, the largest free newspaper in Iceland, published the editorial headline: Shut Up and Be Quiet. The editorial argued that the politicians in power wanted the nation simply to shut up and be quiet while they tried to find solutions to the grave situation—a situation that, according to many, the politicians had created with their implementation of neoliberal ideals. Instead of shutting up, the people continued to apply pressure to the parliament. By January, 2009, the management of the crisis by the government and the parliamentarians, the loss of public trust, and the eventual social unrest led to the resignation of the Prime Minister and his government, and a call was given for new elections.

While the protests raged in Reykjavik and to the north in Akureyri, Húsavik, a town of about 2200 people in a largely isolated part of northern Iceland, was calm and there was limited debate on the crisis. Tinna Grétarsdóttir, an anthropologist and eventual co-curator of Shut Up and Be Quiet!, found herself spending a great deal of time reading news feeds, blogs and blog comments of Icelanders, and searching for

Figure 1. Protestors by the Parliament building in Reykjavik, 20 January 2009. Photo Haukur Már Helgason
videos and photos posted online. Through this process she began collecting images of protests and analysing what was occurring in the conflict and debates. Tinna noted that at this historic time, it was becoming unpleasant to live in the oppressive silence of Husavik. She stated in our interview with her, “It was therefore important to find a way to cut this silence and open space for voices of the people.” Only days before the government resignation, on January 15, 2009, the exhibition *Shut Up and Be Quiet*, curated by Tinna and her husband, and then Director of the museum, Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson, opened to the public.

The exhibition focused on the state of social issues in the wake of the collapse of the Icelandic financial system with special attention directed to the Icelandic people’s voice of protest. The intent of the exhibition was quite political and caused a heated response. For example, at the launch of the exhibition a flyer was sent out by email. It was a satirical and rhetorical manifesto using language and wording taken from various Icelandic blogs and media outlets that included a provocative photoshopped image of the former Prime Minister responsible for the introduction of neo-liberal politics in Iceland. It depicts him in a Nazi costume with the words underneath: “Reign of Error!” (Figure 2).

![Figure 2](image.jpg)

*Figure 2. Photoshopped image of former Prime Minister, Davið Oddson. Unknown artist*

The night before the opening of the exhibition the curators, Sigurjón and Tinna, received a telephone call to their home. The angry voice on the line said, “What the hell is this?” When asked who was calling, the person identified himself as the mayor of the town. Sigurjón calmly explained the rationale behind the exhibition...
and allowed the call to end on good terms. The head of the board of the museum also sent Sigurjón an email asking the following: “What is this? I’ve received several phone calls and comments about this! People have been wondering if the museum is the right venue for a one sided take on the issues that Icelandic society is going through right now. I’ll hear from you.”

Oppression of dissent and general ‘silence’ in Húsavík was not new. At the time, the town was flooded with propaganda concerning plans to construct an aluminium smelter near Húsavík. Those with environmental concerns about the impact of the planet on the ecosystem and residents had been suppressed completely. Moreover, there was a history of indifference in the region. When fishing quotas were implemented in the town and surrounding area years before, the region was heavily affected economically and socially, yet the general public did not protest or show any outrage. To counter these conditions, Shut Up and Be Quiet! was not only a presentation of civil protests, opinions, and photos that were circulating at this time, but also a space for people—a ‘public square’ to discuss and share views by writing opinions on the exhibition wall or on its blog (http://skodanasning.blogspot.is/2009/01/blog-post.html). Interestingly, despite concerns from those in power, once the exhibition opened the people in the region did not take much interest. One resident explained it by saying that people in the region did not identify with the economic collapse or think it was relevant to them because the preceding “good years” (góðærisárin) prior to the collapse did not affect their region. The overall aim of the exhibition was to make a small museum relevant for the people in the region as the crisis affected the whole nation. It also attempted to make the museum relevant on a national level and break out of the tradition of museums outside the capital focusing on regional issues rather than national ones, yet the curators came to understand that they made the mistake of not associating current outrage being expressed across Iceland with recent local history and concerns of the inhabitants of Húsavík.

Although there was little interest at the local level, the exhibition drew national coverage after a report from State Television. The exhibition was converted to a travelling exhibition for two other regional museums in the towns of Höfn and Seyðisfjörður. In Höfn the exhibition was situated in the town library lobby. This location also housed the high school, and saw much traffic from patrons, employees, and students, as well as customers who ate at the restaurant located in the building. The former director of the museum, Björg Erlingsdóttir, stated that the exhibit brought the issue “to people who had not had the opportunity to be direct participants in protests in the capital, but had strong views and would have liked to be participating in what went on. The exhibition was a way to reach those who believed this to be ‘fights’ of those in the capital which had little [to do] with us rural areas.” In our interview she went on to say that museum visitors soon realised, “that the battle concerned us all.” Björg said responses to the exhibition in Höfn were mixed with amusement and uncertainty about its “appropriateness,” but that changed as people took time to see its potential to present “crisis stories where [the Icelandic] national character reveal[ed] itself with all the many speculations that people have had about
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the situation in recent weeks and months.” She explained that although visitors were at first skeptical and apprehensive about the exhibition giving an impression of celebrating protest, they came around as they embraced the citizen’s right to protest and shared their thoughts about the situation. In Seyðisfjörður the exhibit was supplemented with photos of protests in the town, and yet the museum had only a small turnout to the exhibition. Despite this, Pétur Kristjánsson, the curator in Seyðisfjörður, noted in an interview with us that the exhibition “worked very well as a catalyst for conversation, so people could talk about the events that had taken place and even get a clearer picture of what had been happening and what was going on (and become firmer in their opposition to the dominant system).”

Segja þessir hlutir söguna? (Do These Things Tell a Story?)

The original Shut Up and Be Quiet! was also the impetus for the National Museum of Iceland and the Reykjavik Municipality Museum to start actively collecting material artefacts used in the public protests in the wake of the financial collapse. What was termed the “the pots and pans revolution” or “the kitchenware revolution” for protestors banging on pots during demonstrations became the foundation for the museum collection that included these items, as well as protest signs and banners. Prompted by the Shut Up and Be Quiet! exhibition and their own collection of protest artefacts, the National Museum put on a small exhibition in early 2010 titled, Do These Things Tell a Story? (Segja þessir hlutir söguna?). In addition to artefacts, the exhibit called upon visitors to express their own ideas and beliefs about the economic collapse, the protests, and how it should be preserved. As the image in Figure 3 shows, visitors could write on a large roll of paper adjacent to the artefacts.

The museum press release described the exhibition as a collection of artefacts used in protests in the aftermath of the financial collapse in 2008, including protest signs, flyers, gas containers, and more that either came from the general public or were collected in the field. The museum explained that these artefacts were exhibited in the midst of these turbulent times in order to elicit public opinions about the artefacts being collected. They wanted to understand how the museum reflected upon the current era with the artefacts? Do these things tell a story and what is that story? The museum went on in the press release to note that “We are all experts in our own time and now the museum calls out for assistance. What should be preserved for the future? What shows the events that took place in 2008–2009… Artefacts are preserved for the future so they can be researched and exhibited after 2, 50 or 350 years. Now, the museum is collecting things that show the times we live at and visitors are asked to express their opinions about the things that have been collected so far to give the best image of todays psyche.”

The resulting public comments were not exactly what museum staff had in mind, with one staff member telling us it was “beyond decency.” According to one of the exhibition designers and collaborators in the effort, the museum “wanted visitors to participate and we trusted that they could, and wanted to. We were ready to listen to
their views and accept what they offered us and make it part of the exhibition. We didn’t expect that people would become rude.” Visitors’ hostility raised questions of censorship. Given the inflammatory comments, was it appropriate for the exhibition to be placed in the main entrance of the National Museum? How should the museum deal with potential slander? These were questions new to the museum, and ones for which they found no clear answers.

DISCUSSION

The economic crisis in many ways caused a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1998) for Icelanders, and of course one could easily argue the museum. All were suddenly faced with a real-life economic and social crisis that called into question their beliefs about their government, the banking system, exhibitionary practice, and/or their own voice in the political process and how it was displayed. Although Mezirow (1998, 2000) argues that disorienting dilemmas serve as catalysts for transformational learning and a trigger for critical self reflection, they are not easy. As Mälkki (2012) points out, many dilemmas are accompanied by emotional strain, which can make critical self and social reflection a difficult and painful process. We conclude this chapter by talking about some of the ways Shut Up and Be Quiet! served an important, albeit problematic, site for visitors and peer institutions as it stimulated dialogue and anger about the economic crisis and thereby created opportunities for reflection, debate and engagement, both positive and negative, at various levels.
As the case above demonstrates, museums can support and encourage radical thinking in action through public pedagogy and social movement learning in both the content they choose to highlight and their approaches to representation and engagement. The exhibition brought the economic crisis in Iceland to individuals who were largely insulated from the outcries heard in the capital, Reykjavik, and changed how they engaged in political discourse through its display of controversial perspectives. Indeed, the content was very controversial and out of character in Húsavík, a town of few inhabitants and that is culturally confined and rather economically stable. By shifting the view of museum audiences as merely visitors seeking distraction or entertainment to one that sees them as adult learners, museums can intentionally create opportunities for individuals to reflect on experiences that disorient, confound, or disrupt worldviews and beliefs. Again, this is not easy and it is in fact disruptive. But to counter a disruptive world, we need institutions willing to provide disruptive counter narratives and images.

The economic crisis also created new learning opportunities for Icelandic cultural institutions. Museums and their staff faced difficult choices about how to document, collect, and represent a highly charged and unprecedented event and the public response to it. Curators of Shut Up and Be Quiet! made a decision that led to fostering social movement and public discourse that was uncharacteristic for Icelandic museums. It modeled for other institutions a way to frame and critique the national crisis and demonstrated how visitors could engage with the exhibition and the issues it raised. The District Culture Centre in Húsavík’s public pedagogy was subsequently taken up in a similar fashion by the National Museum, thus redefining and broadening the purposes of Icelandic cultural institutions. Museums seeking to take on a more critical role in facilitating adult learning and public discourse should foster networking with other institutions to create and share a larger vision for visitor engagement (Lord & Blankenberg, 2015) that builds a systemic process for public pedagogy.

The exhibition made public pedagogy a central feature in order to advance reflection, discussion, and debate at a societal level. In a paper exploring Iceland’s economic crisis, Kristín Loftsdóttir (2014) described it as “not simply an event that Icelanders reacted to but… a field of engagement that can be acted upon” (p. 3). Shut Up and Be Quiet! and the subsequent exhibition, Do These Things Tell a Story?, in many ways served as the field of engagement for museum visitors. Lord and Blankenberg (2015) contend that museums help define the character of a place, in part through what they choose to promote; as such, radical exhibition choices like Shut Up and Be Quiet! are critical to societies. In Iceland, where there are strong nationalistic ideas (Matthíasdóttir, 2001), the museums’ decision to embrace dissent and normalise the practice of questioning government challenged the traditional roles of citizens (and museum visitors), allowing Icelanders to hear others’ anger and frustration, as well as sharing their own, thus bringing about reflection at a societal level. Public outcry and waves of protests were a paradigm shift in public expression in Iceland. Historically, Icelanders rarely resorted to civil protest and usually abided by official rules and regulations. Now, although Iceland has begun
its economic recovery, groups of protestors speaking out about a range of social and political issues is a common sight. So for museums, like the ones we highlighted in this chapter, there is a responsibility to not only represent the history of the past, but what is soon to be the history of the future, and to shape what is to become the ‘new normal’ for the societies they serve.

NOTE
1 An extended version of this chapter is also published in the journal, Studies in the Education of Adults.

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2. ST MUNGO MUSEUM OF RELIGIOUS LIFE AND ART

A Space to Speak, Discuss and be Heard

INTRODUCTION

The Necropolis sits on a hill high above Glasgow. An interdenominational graveyard, the first burial was of a Jewish man named Joseph Levi in 1932. To the south, crossing the river Clyde, lies the Gorbals, an area which grew in population from the late eighteenth century onwards and has drawn people from the Scottish highlands, Irish people escaping famine, Jewish people fleeing violence in Poland, Russia and Lithuania and, more recently, Indians and Pakistanis. Today, the Central Mosque is tucked on the south bank of the river, its dome a golden jewel on the Glasgow skyline. To the west of the Necropolis, at the foot of the hill, Glasgow Cathedral rises, a medieval Catholic church of blackened stone. This is a church which survived, almost intact, the Protestant Reformation in Scotland, led by John Knox, while others were ransacked and destroyed in an effort to rid the country of Catholicism. The spot on which the Cathedral sits was chosen, so the story goes, by St Mungo the patron saint of Glasgow, to fulfil his quest of establishing a Christian community in sixth century Scotland. It would become the centre from which Glasgow would unfurl.

ST MUNGO AND NEUTRALITY

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art opened in Glasgow in 1992 and sits where the Bishop’s Castle for the Cathedral once did. The building was designed in medieval style to reflect its surroundings and was originally intended as a visitor centre for the Cathedral. The project ran out of funds and the building was passed to Glasgow City Council to create a museum of religion from the city’s existing collections. The museum focused on the world religions practised most prominently in Scotland such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism, as well as showing objects representing religions rooted in other parts of the world such as the Smallpox Spirit of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. O’Neill (1995), a member of the team which created the museum, was clear from the start that it was not intended to be objective, a common pretext of these institutions, but rather existed.

D. E. Clover et al. (Eds.), Adult Education, Museums and Art Galleries, 15–25.
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to promote explicitly a set of values: respect for the diversity of human beliefs.

The museum opened with the intention that the work which happened there, exhibitions and public programmes alike, would be underpinned by the museum's mission statement which was to promote understanding and respect between people of different faiths and those of none. (p. 52)

The decision to explicitly promote a set of values contradicts the perception of a museum as a place that offers an objective, unbiased interpretation of subject matter. The often accepted notion of the museum as an objective or neutral place, however, is difficult to accept. A museum takes subjective decisions such as which objects to collect, the themes of exhibitions, which objects to select and omit when creating exhibitions, which groups and individuals to consult with and which interpretation methods to use. Even so, when working with a historical topic, an exhibition can appear to be objective since it will likely reflect a breadth of research on the subject.

The potential sources of information on the topic are also likely to be relatively limited and accepted historical narratives well-established. Most of the objects shown in St Mungo’s galleries, however, represent contemporary religions and the most significant knowledge and experience of these objects can be found within religious communities. These objects have meaning in people’s everyday lives and the information about them, shared by individuals and communities, is not only limitless but also dynamic. To describe the museum as objective, with the suggestion of authority that comes with perceived objectivity, would fail to recognise the experience and influence of religious communities and the meaning the objects hold for them. While the museum strives to be well informed and present balanced views, an emphasis is placed on consulting with religious communities when creating exhibitions and programmes.

CRITICAL ISSUE-BASED ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Influenced by the intention to promote understanding and respect, St Mungo Museum developed a range of programmes for adults. Some of these programmes took an information sharing approach but others have been much more social issue-based and have responded to influences such as discord in local communities. Glasgow has, for instance, long acknowledged sectarian issues between Catholic and Protestant communities which are rooted in links to Northern Ireland, as well as hostilities which Catholic Irish immigrants faced on arrival in Scotland. The Church of Scotland released a report in 1923 titled The Menace of the Irish Race to Our Scottish Nationality. The report argued that Irish immigrants who were Orange (Protestant) were not a problem since they were of the same religion as Scots, who were predominantly Protestant due to the triumph of the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation was a movement in Europe during the 16th Century which challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and promoted Protestantism instead. This meant, so the report claimed, Protestant Irish immigrants
could more easily integrate into Scottish life. The focus of the report was specifically on Irish Catholics and suggested that their allegiance to the church was particularly problematic. The report goes on to offer a breakdown of the numbers of Irish people and of Catholics throughout Scotland, making it clear that any increase would be undesirable. It was not until 2002 that the Church of Scotland expressed regret at the bigotry they displayed towards Irish Catholics. Sectarianism in contemporary Glasgow may not be quite so pronounced but there remains residual prejudice. This is perhaps most noticeable between fans of Rangers and Celtic football clubs, Rangers being traditionally supported by Protestants and Celtic by Catholics. Deeply bigoted songs can still be heard in the streets when the Old Firm? play. And, notably, Catholic and Protestant children are still educated separately in Scotland.

Responding to such prejudice and discord evident in society has been the cornerstone of much of the museum’s issue-based work. While the museum has also explored many of the celebratory and enlightening aspects of religion, for the purposes of exploring facilitation, it is the issue-based programmes which are the most important work the museum does and the focus of this chapter. Facilitating issue-based programmes, in whatever form they take, can be challenging for a facilitator whose experience predominantly lies in museum education and I speak to this at the conclusion of the chapter. But let me begin with what I mean by the term ‘facilitator’.

I use facilitator deliberately as opposed to ‘educator or ‘teacher’. Paulo Freire (2003) spoke of the banking concept which he identified as a type of education where the narrative is led by the teacher and received passively by the students. Describing a teacher as narrator he argues:

Narration leads the students to memorise mechanically the narrated account. Worse yet, it turns them into containers…to be ‘filled’ by the teachers. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are. Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor. (pp. 72–73)

Freire is describing a particularly authoritarian, didactic approach in which the teacher espouses and seeks no engagement from the students at all. It is not an approach many adult educators would take now, at least not to the extent Freire describes. In his description both learning and knowledge are treated like property to be passed back and forth. Freire strongly rejects the banking concept, claiming it to be oppressive; he also says elsewhere that he still sees the teacher as the leader of the learning experience:

The moment the teacher begins the dialogue, he or she knows a great deal, first in terms of knowledge and second in terms of the horizon that he or she wants to get to. The starting point is what the teacher knows about the object and where the teacher wants to go with it. (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 103)
But issue-based discussions would focus on the experiences and knowledge of the participants which are held by the group, creating a situation where the content can only belong to the group. When working with subject matter which belongs to the group, particularly in a critical context in a museum, I believe the teacher’s knowledge should not be the starting point of the discussion. If real open discussion and debate is to take place, and we are to challenge the ‘knowledge authority’ practices typical of museums, we need to create spaces where participants can explore, or better said interrogate, their own assumptions, opinions and ideas. We need to begin with what they know and how they know it. The horizon cannot be envisaged in advance nor can the destination be predetermined. I would suggest that in the case of issue based discussion, museum staff should act more as facilitators as opposed to educators for as Kitzinger (2005) reminds us, “the forms of communication that people use in their everyday life ‘may tell us as much, if not more’” (p. 58). However, this does not mean relinquishing all knowledge authority and responsibility which I will illustrate in various ways in what follows.

FLEXIBILITY AND PLANNING

It is likely that many museum facilitators will consider the main purpose of museum education/experience is to engage visitors with the collection. Their role would be to facilitate an additional layer of interpretation which allows the visitor or participant to see objects in a new way, to learn something new or further explore knowledge they already possess. In my own experience, the museum facilitator does not have a rigid set of criteria to be fulfilled or information which must be imparted. Even in the case of a fairly traditional museum tour there is often an element of flexibility which is influenced by the interaction between the guide and visitors taking part. Although I may set out on a general tour with a set of objects in mind to discuss, as the group engages in conversation and their interests emerge, my intentions may change. While this approach is flexible and responds to the influence of the visitor, I will be prepared with nuggets of information about the objects which can be used along the way to prompt conversation or, if it becomes clear the group would rather listen than discuss, can form the bones of a more traditional talk. The group may gather silently around, for example, Ahmed Moustafa’s *Attributes of Divine Perfection* shown in St Mungo Museum’s art gallery. The piece is a work on paper and shows a large cube which has been flipped open to reveal ninety-nine smaller white cubes. Each of the white cubes bear one of the 99 Names of God. There is Arabic calligraphy on the surfaces around the cube which includes quotes from the Qu’ran. This piece of art is likely to be quite different from anything many visitors will have seen before. A couple of probing questions to the group might discover whether anyone has knowledge of Islamic art or any observations they wish to share. I might seek out someone in the group who is aware that it would be unusual, though not completely unheard of, to find the human form in Islamic art. Moustafa has, instead, focused on geometric forms and intricate Arabic calligraphy. A group with
knowledge, curiosity or suggestions might wish to guide the discussion themselves at this point. Another group, equally well informed and interested, might prefer to listen instead. However lightly the information may be drawn upon, the facilitator almost always comes into the situation with more prepared information about the object than the participant does and uses this to guide the direction the conversation may take. When working with contemporary religious objects or political topics, such as sectarianism or racism, the participants almost always have at least as much experience of and investment in the topic as the facilitator, and very often more. The direction that the conversation may take is, in many ways, much less predictable for the facilitator.

There are two main types of discussion which, in my experience, happen in a museum like St Mungo. The first is planned discussion which is structured by the facilitator in advance and which has a clear purpose and topic. The discussion tends to be developed with community partners for closed groups but can also be marketed openly for anyone to attend, depending on the topic and purpose. As already mentioned, facilitation is often the best approach to creating the most effective discussion. Facilitation suggests that group members, utilising their experiences and knowledge, are placed at the centre of the programme or workshop. The facilitator is not in a position of authority nor imparting knowledge which they alone hold. They are, instead, putting in place structures and processes which will assist the group in communicating their own ideas. Schwartz argues the facilitator’s main task is to help the group increase its effectiveness by improving its process and structure. Process refers to how a group works together. It includes how members talk to each other, identify and solve problems, make decisions, and handle conflict. Structure refers to stable recurring group processes, such as group membership or group roles. In contrast, content refers to what a group is working on. (1995, p. 3)

By this definition, the museum facilitator is responsible for designing sessions that encourage groups to work well together and for defining the group’s purpose. The facilitator should still be well informed about the subject to be discussed in order to have some knowledge of where potential conflicts may lie, allowing the facilitator to create appropriate sessions and develop a deeper understanding of participants’ perspectives. Participants and facilitators, then, enter into this planned discussion with some understanding of the core topic and an anticipation of the direction the conversation may take. When objects are explored during planned discussion, the facilitator will mostly have identified them in advance, usually with a specific issue in mind.

Spontaneous discussion, on the other hand, occurs when an object unexpectedly sparks an issue. For example, not long after St Mungo opened its doors to the public, a Christian man came into the museum and walked through the art gallery, passing an alabaster statue of Mary grieving, cradling Jesus in her arms after the crucifixion. He entered the space where Shiva stands and placed a bible in the middle of the
floor before pushing the heavy statue over, breaking Shiva’s outstretched arm and cracking the halo of flames which surrounds him. The man objected to Christianity being given equal significance to the other religions shown in the museum. What I am pointing out with this example is that the probability of unpredictable conflict in actions by visitors, but also in conversations and workshops is natural in a museum setting. The museum facilitator however, given that sessions usually have flexible learning objectives, may have greater freedom to pursue them more fully. And facilitation at St Mungo Museum, given the museum’s active commitment to promoting understanding and respect, encourages pursuit of further discussion when intolerance arises.

Dealing with Sensitive Issues

When considering planned discussion around sensitive issues, it is important to consider the reason for the interaction taking place. Discussions around, for example, racism and sectarianism have the potential to be incredibly uncomfortable for people taking part and possibly even damaging if not carefully facilitated. Planned discussion and workshops in St Mungo Museum typically respond to issues relevant to Glasgow or Scotland. It might be that a local group has requested workshops around a topic such as sectarianism. The group themselves may be responding to a particular incident or situation they have experienced. Or the topic may be a national one, such as the unsupportive response of some religious leaders and communities prior to the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 which allowed same sex couples to enter into marriage, opening the possibility of religious ceremonies. It might arise from changes in the city such as Glasgow City Council’s decision to sign up as a dispersal city for refugees in 1999 which saw tensions in some communities and even instances of violence. Workshops and discussion may very directly address the subject matter, as is often the case with sectarian work, or they may unpick surrounding ideas such as what offering a positive welcome to refugees might look like. Wherever the discussion springs from, the topic attempts to be clear and purposeful to all taking part, facilitators and participants alike. Clarity works towards an equality of understanding at the outset and increases the likelihood of a positive commitment to the conversation.

Setting a clear and well researched topic gives good grounding to open a discussion. The facilitator is not, however, using research to drive the conversation in a particular direction. The intention is to establish a platform where meaningful discussion can take place rather than persuade participants to a particular viewpoint; all participants should feel confident that their views will be heard. Many facilitators may have the instinct to close down discussion that becomes too raw or reveals views that are usually not socially acceptable or appear hurtful. In many ways this is a good instinct because the intention is to ensure the space is a safe one and that people feel welcome. However, if views, even quite uncomfortable ones, are
closed down it may falsely appear that consensus has been reached. If the intention of the discussion is to reach new understanding about the topic or each other, a false consensus, while it may initially feel more comfortable, doesn’t meet that purpose.

Safety and Respect

The facilitator does, however, have a responsibility to create a space that is safe and respectful. This begins before the group meets by clearly defining the subject for discussion and selecting participants who have chosen to take part with this awareness. As the discussion opens there are approaches which can assist in creating a respectful forum. The facilitator might wish to open the session with an exploration of the concept of respectful discussion, encouraging participants to contribute their own definitions. In the context of St Mungo Museum, a facilitator might choose to focus this exercise on an object such as Dora Holzhandler’s The Sabbath Candles. The painting shows a Jewish mother lighting Sabbath candles on a Friday evening, a ritual performed by Jewish women and girls to bring peace to the home. The artist says that despite a sometimes difficult relationship with her religion, this was a very happy memory for her. Looking closely at the painting, the group might notice the setting sun in the window, the family settling together for the evening with the common purpose of resting. Or that each family member has their space at the table and the group seem comfortable with each other. The candles themselves bring an illumination to the scene. With discussion around the painting as an introduction, the group might explore the elements they feel they could be put in place to help facilitate a peaceful and productive discussion. It may be that the group are in harmony with their descriptions and that informal conversation around respect is adequate. Or the facilitator or group members may feel that it is worth formalising agreed guidelines which can be written and displayed for reference. It is worth encouraging the inclusion of confidentiality, active listening, avoiding personal attacks and promoting openness. These approaches will not absolutely ensure a respectful discussion throughout the session. What they will do, though, is give the group and the facilitator a framework to return to if the discussion becomes overly heated or unfocused. If a facilitator needs to intervene during the discussion it will not be to close down the viewpoint which is being expressed. Instead it will be to return to the guidelines which the group have agreed to abide by, therefore allowing honesty and avoiding, as far as is possible, false consensus.

It can also help participants to feel secure to learn a little about the viewpoints held by others in the group before fully entering discussion. There are various planned exercises which can work well such as asking each person to introduce themselves and their current view on the subject. A slightly more structured exercise might also be used, such as taking a series of statements and exploring to what extent each person agrees or disagrees and how fixed they believe themselves to be in that opinion. This can be designed as a group exercise so that all participants visually
give their answer simultaneously, for instance by placing a dot on a chart, or standing in a particular position in a room. In this way individuals can offer their own view without feeling overly exposed while, at the same time, gathering an understanding of the breadth of views in the group. Offering an opinion which many in the group may strongly disagree with could make an individual feel vulnerable. Exercises such as the examples given, and others, allow people to quickly gather information which allows them to make informed choices about the level of risk they wish to take. It is not the intention that this information should intimidate a participant into silence, even if the opinion or belief they hold appears to be the minority. Exercises like these should, however, give the participant the opportunity to decide for themselves if they view the situation as safe at that moment in time. That assessment can change over the course of the session and facilitation with an emphasis on respect and confidentiality should begin work towards openness. The visibility of a range of opinions might also encourage openness to learning, depending on how fixed people feel about their own views. Ultimately though, the process is only productive if it a positive experience for participants and no participant should be pushed to take greater risks than they are comfortable with.

Every group is different and it can be worth taking a flexible approach when facilitating challenging subject matter. Some groups will conduct a positive discussion quite naturally without much intervention from a facilitator. Others might struggle to open up, or a discussion might begin that is dominated by a small number of individuals. Attempting a range of exercises that work well in particular situations and having them to hand enables the facilitator to be flexible in their approach. Introducing an exercise can bring a more balanced dynamic to the group or provide a springboard for conversation. From a museum adult education perspective, the exercises which will work best will also be dependent on the objects on display and are specific to each museum. While much of the follow-up discussion may happen in private, confidential space, it is probable that original objects will be viewed and considered at some point. Using an example from St Mungo’s galleries, exploring the meaning of the Sikh symbol could be useful. The symbol is flanked by crossed swords, one which symbolises spirituality and other political aspects of life. A good starting point for a discussion or exercise can involve the idea of balancing spiritual beliefs with social responsibilities, possibly leading to an exploration of the types of communities people would like to live in and the kinds of actions that foster a positive environment.

SPONTANEITY

The second sort of discussion that occurs at St Mungo is unplanned and spontaneous. This sort of discussion arises most often, in my experience, when working with groups that are already established rather than individuals who have come together for the first time. The group and facilitator set out, for instance, on a general tour that
is not anticipated to generate any conflict or raise any significant misunderstandings. Yet, as the group explore the galleries, conversations begin to reveal a lack of understanding of other religions and even anger and intolerance. It can be any object that triggers this reaction. It may even be Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of great compassion. This Buddhist Bodhisattva can be male or female and has eleven heads and a thousand arms. Such is Avalokiteshvara’s wish to help all sentient beings, her heads allow her to see suffering in all directions and her arms to reach many. The idea that Bodhisattvas have these deity-like attributes, yet are not gods, may contradict some people’s ideas about religion. Or the unfamiliarity, to some, of the form of the Bodhisattva might make others uncomfortable when they make a comparison with the image of god they hold themselves. It has happened that the visitor then goes on to passionately express opinions which deeply lack respect and understanding not only about the object or faith in question but about individuals who practice that religion.

The freedom to fully pursue unplanned discussion might be unique to the informal learning in a museum setting. Sessions are rarely defined by fixed learning outcomes and there is no identified destination at which the group must arrive. The visitor experience and interpretation of objects is the priority. At St Mungo the mission statement ‘to promote understanding and respect between people of different faiths and those of none’ guides and is at the forefront of discussion. So when a group member strongly voices an opinion which is dismissive and intolerant of others, the facilitator would likely introduce some questions or statements which explore the issue a little further. The steps that have been taken for planned discussion, such as defining the subject, ensuring participants are clear and actively wish to take part, have not been put into place, so it is necessary to proceed with care. There is a certain level of instinct involved in reading a group’s reaction to the potential conflict which has arisen and an experienced facilitator should respond to that reaction. If the discussion becomes more involved, it is worth asking the group if they wish to continue or to move on. It may seem surprising, but I have experienced very few groups who were hesitant to explore the issue further. And some of the most honest, unguarded and productive discussions have taken place in this spontaneous context. In this situation, the facilitator might suggest that the group, for a while at least, find a private space, in order to consider both other visitors in the gallery and the group themselves. It is possible that some of the views being expressed by the group have the potential to make other visitors feel uncomfortable and even unwelcome. And the group themselves need privacy and confidentiality if they are to continue to explore their ideas with honesty. It is entirely possible, and even helpful, in this spontaneous situation to apply many of the same facilitation techniques as with planned discussion. If the group want to enter a deeper discussion, guidelines for respect can be brought in, with the group’s agreement, as can many of the exercises that have been developed for planned discussion, or the group might only require a safe space in which to hold their conversation.
Finding Commonalities

At their best, museums like St Mungo Museum encourage people to come together and find their commonality and also to accept their differences with generosity. The world seems to be increasingly polarised yet for every divisive event an accompanying tide of people seeking unity arises. There is a refugee crisis across Europe and the Middle East. Considering Syria alone, millions of people are refugees in neighbouring countries and Europe, around half of which are children. In response the UK government, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, has offered to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees over a period of five years. Meantime a ‘Refugees Welcome’ campaign has sprung up across UK and grassroots organisations have taken action shelter building in Calais, assisting refugees arriving in Lesbos and donating, sorting and distributing clothing and tents to camps. In November 2015 an attack on Paris by terrorists claiming links to Daesh sent a further shock through Europe. Less than a week later the Bishopbriggs Cultural Centre in Glasgow, a building which also served as a mosque, was deliberately set on fire. Yet following the Paris attacks, the Central Mosque in Glasgow had been promoting a peace vigil in the city centre to honour victims and few days later organised a multi-faith press call condemning the attacks and calling for unity. In the international context, Muslims across the world have taken part in the Not in my Name campaign disassociating Islam with terrorism. As perceived divisions deepen, so humanity also rises and seeks to challenge the most violent and powerful with declarations of unity and peace. Like adult education in general, museums can and must play a role in bringing about positive, progressive justice and change.

FINAL THOUGHTS: TRAINING

It is essential that communities, whether local, national and international, have spaces in which to speak and be heard about difficult and controversial issues. Individuals can claim the streets to protest or create and join virtual conversations and campaigns. But museums can be an important part of these discussions, offering space and programmes relevant to communities and the issues of our times. St Mungo Museum, was involved in doing this from the outset, using its educational programming and exhibitions to provide a space for debate, dialogue and empathy. In other words, museum collections have the potential to trigger discussions which can be challenging, political and contemporary. However, I would argue that it is essential for museum staff to have the training and skills in adult education, to create and facilitate programmes which deal with such explosive and emotive issues as I have outlined in this chapter. I would argue it is critical to seek out good quality adult education training which can be offered by non-governmental organisations or degree programmes in higher education. Responding to contemporary issues and offering well researched and facilitated programmes can deepen a museum’s
relevance to the community and contribute actively to social justice and change. And being relevant must be the aim that all museums works towards.

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