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Mediaciones Lúdicas Sobre el Cuerpo de la Mujer en la Cultura Visual Neoliberal Occidental

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Mediaciones Lúdicas Sobre el Cuerpo de la Mujer en la Cultura Visual Neoliberal Occidental

Leticia Balzi Costa

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(Recibido: 8 febrero 2021; Aceptado: 30 noviembre 2022; Publicado: 3 febrero 2023)

Resumen

The Gendered Planet es un proyecto de investigación artística, que analiza y deconstruye la mercantilización de los cuerpos de las mujeres en la cultura visual neoliberal occidental en relación a las identidades opresivas creadas históricamente. Este proyecto de carácter interdisciplinario utiliza pedagogías de activismo y metodologías de *artistic research* para reflexionar cómo una acción repetida en los contextos de museos y galerías de arte puede mediar diferentes conversaciones sobre las intersecciones entre el capitalismo, el patriarcado y los posibles efectos sobre las ecologías del Antropoceno. El objetivo de esta investigación es revelar las estrategias, las consecuencias sociales y ambientales a través del juego pedagógico llamado *Not my King*. El mismo consiste en cartas que se pueden usar para juegos y lectura de tarot.

Palabras clave: Feminismo; política de la estética; giro educativo

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Resum

The Gendered Planet és un projecte de recerca artística que analitza i deconstrueix la mercantilització dels cossos de les dones en la cultura visual neoliberal occidental en relació a les identitats opressores creades històricament. Aquest projecte interdisciplinari utilitza pedagogies de l'activisme i metodologies de recerca artística per reflexionar sobre com una acció repetida en el context de museus i galeries d'art pot mediar diferents converses sobre les interseccions entre capitalisme, patriarcat i els possibles efectes sobre les ecologies de l'Antropocè. L'objectiu d'aquesta recerca és revelar les estratègies, les conseqüències socials i ambientals a través del joc pedagògic anomenat *Not my King*. Aquest, consisteix en cartes que es poden utilitzar per a jocs i lectura de tarot.

Paraules clau: Feminisme; política de l'estètica; gir educatiu

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Playful Mediations About the Body of Women and Western Neoliberal Visual Culture

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Abstract

The Gendered Planet is an artistic research project, which analyzes and deconstructs the commodification of women's bodies in Western neoliberal visual culture in which oppressive identities of women have been historically engineered. This interdisciplinary project uses pedagogies of activism and artistic research methodologies to reflect upon how a repeated action in the contexts of museums and galleries can bring different conversations on the intersections between capitalism, patriarchy, and possible effects on Anthropocene ecologies. This research aims to reveal the strategies, and social as well as environmental consequences through the pedagogical game *Not my King* which consists of cards that can be used for games and tarot reading.

Keywords: Feminism; political aesthetics; educational turn

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Playful Mediations About the Body of Women and Western Neoliberal Visual Culture

Our bodies naturally are subject to and obey the angelic nature as regards local motion. But the bad angels, although they have lost grace, have not lost their natural power, as has often been said before. And since the faculty of fancy or imagination is corporeal, that is, allied to a physical organ, it also is naturally subject to devils, so that they can transmute it, causing various phantasies, by the flow of the thoughts and perceptions to the original image received by them. (Kramer & Sprenger. *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 1487, part I question X)

The idea of a masculinized art history and the invention of the figures of witches has fascinated me since I was an art student. Also while working as an art director in advertising, I used to look into the history of art making aesthetics choices for graphic campaigns which unconsciously biased gender stereotypes. These experiences and being harassed in working contexts as well as everyday street walks, drew me to work on this artistic research project to open dialogues about the politics of aesthetics of women's bodies in the neoliberal western visual culture. Because of this, I looked back again into the history of art where since the advent of capitalism in the 16th century and up to the present day, culture and religion have been used as oppressive tools to organize power structures in order to accumulate wealth. For this project, I thought of making some witchcraft using design and art education to explore how performance and activism in museum contexts can be merged with an interdisciplinary combination of feminist live art practice in the form of plays and games. As a starting point I used the question of: Where do capitalism, patriarchy (and the Anthropocene) intersect?

To start, I argue that all the natural commodities have been exploited in the figure of the female body throughout Western visual culture. This brought up the concept of a *The Gendered Planet*. That said, I started to draw more specific directions with more questions: How do we engage in play? How does

behavior become play? What happens when these premises are placed in the art context? I started to answer the questions following Flanagan's *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (2009) and Sharp's *Works of Game: On the Aesthetics of Games and Art* (2015) in the literature review section.

The political motivation behind this artistic research project connects with the art practice in terms of choices made in the imagery used. From visuals from the history of art from XVII to the XXI century, a selection of history of art images were used to design a set of playing cards tarot size called *Not my King*. The cards are shown in *image 1* and *image 3*. It is illustrated with a selection of visuals, statements, data, and excerpts from researchers and artists. This pedagogical resource can be used in art contexts as part of a performance aiming to open discussions about the intersections of oppressive politics regarding the representation of women's bodies in the neoliberal western visual culture.

The arrangement of space, as shown in *image 2*, connects to the idea that art is education, and the spectator should feel invited and comfortable to play a card game in the art context of a museum. This is also the result of testing three times how cards can be used within different audiences prior to the opening of the exhibition. Regarding the exhibition strategies, and as explained before, I framed the politics of representation as denoted by Western visual culture, to help the audience establish connections between the impact of patriarchal capitalism on how women's bodies are used as cultural commodities to promote consumerism.

In addition to that, I suggest that this oppressive aesthetics have devastating effects on the environment. However, this is an ongoing research question, and more research must be conducted in the future to expose the connections between the Anthropocene epoch, constituting the history of capitalism. The expectation for audiences or artists/participants alike was to open dialogues about what their previous knowledge and connections brought while playing different games. The museum audience interacted with a tarot reader who used the cards to expose how our social identities and consumerist choices are gendered and cannot escape the capitalist system. Furthermore, women have been objectified, portrayed as luxury items and animalized for consumption

to reproduce the workforce required to ensure the current Western neoliberal economy (Federici, 2012, 2014).



Image 1. Balzi Costa, L. *Not my King (toolkit)*. *The Gendered Planet*. 2018-2019. [Printed playing cards].



Image 2. Balzi Costa, L. *Not my King (toolkit)*. *The Gendered Planet*. 2018-2019. [Tarot Reading. Installation]. Gramønla Museum. Trondheim.

Methodology

a. Research Context

Using contemporary art strategies of disruption within a ludic space, this toolkit works to articulate and inspire ongoing discussions in varying pedagogical contexts such as museums, galleries and cultural institutions. The context of this project has been analyzed as an art practice in ways that could be relevant to museum studies since it calls for an interdisciplinary approach including art history, performance, play, and game studies. The academic methodology examines literature with a special focus on Nussbaum's objectification theory (1995) and Federici's research on capitalism and reproduction (2011 & 2014). It also incorporates highlights from a selection of images from the Western history of art up to now. It acknowledges Ladson Billings (1998) to discuss issues of 'intersectionality' in feminist education. To suggest that the politics of aesthetics of women's bodies in the western visual neoliberal culture is still biasing forms of intersectional discrimination I incorporated citations from authors and quantitative data to inform the audience while playing with the cards.

b. Theoretical Framework

I proclaim myself as the first witch to be judged. Witchcraft in the contemporary times is symbolic-transformative act that would hopefully create new strings to help us stand together as humans advocating for women's rights and recognition.

Personal is political and I take this seriously as I am a white Hispanic woman who has worked in advertising, experiencing systemic oppressive strategies as part of the briefing that corporations use to send to the advertising agency in order to create campaigns. To break the capitalist spell, I demonized literature and introduce it into the art practice applying the methodology of this artistic research. The outcome of the installation arrangement can be seen in *image 2*. I did this arrangement because research shows that strategy games and plays such as playing cards can be used as engagement objects within the art context. The idea of repetition in this art practice connects to performance with the participation of an audience. At the same time, it is that audience who

will create the art performance by playing different games. This project can have different performative outcomes. However, as it happened in one museum context, it might just be the opposite: an empty table with cards that are simply observed as an art object.

Witchcraft and capitalism. To understand this wicked political aesthetics, my research starts with the 16th-century where the acceleration of capitalism in an unstable Europe (due to catholic church fragmentation, fear, superstition, sex repulsion, and climate change) unexpectedly supported accusations of witch-hunting.

Regarding this, Federici describes in her book *Caliban and the Witch* (2014, pp. 97-115) how the consequences of such witch hunts were devastating for women since they aroused hysteria against them, celebrating new forms of capitalist Aquelarre (also known as ‘Witches Sabbath’). With my toolkit, I aim to deconstruct this mindless scenario using concepts introduced by Rancière (2004) and Federici (2014), Nussbaum’s objectification theory (1995), Nochlin’s research on masculinization of the art history (2017) and Jackson’s statements on domesticity (2007). One of the main points of this research tights to Rancière who explains in *The Distribution of the Sensible: The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*, that: “Images are set to a regime of politics based on the indetermination of identities, the delegitimization of positions of speech, deregulation of partitions of space and time.” (2004, p. 13).

Remarkable, Schiebinger (1993) explains in *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* how scientists infiltrated sex in the botanical world and developed assumptions about gender.

Within the context of Western visual culture, examples of these political aesthetics can be found throughout the colonization of the Americas where individuals were categorized based on their ethnicity, gender, race, and religion to ensure the success of this first phase of capitalism. During this period, many engravings illustrated the individualization of power by alliances that patronized local lineages. Engravings such as *Kindertijd* by Wierix (1563 - before 1619) are shown in *image 4, Nova Reperta America* shown in *image 5*, and *The Reward of Labour and Diligence* by Galle (1588-

1622) shown in *image 6* – among other similar engravings from XVI-XVII century – conflate naked women with land – clear signs of geopolitics by representing women as the ‘privatized commons’ (as cited in *Re-enchanting the World : Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* Federici & Linebaugh, 2018). Even if the aesthetic inspiration of these images were the Roman and Greek female deities, the body is displaced from a subject –deity– to an object –an objectified woman who reproduces the working force while nurturing other animals used as commodities. For example, in *image 6* nature is represented as a woman with multiple breasts from which she nurtures a human baby, a sheep, a deer, and a pig. These two images do not represent the biological aspect of breastfeeding but are a visual representation of the female body in terms of reproduction and the abundance of this planet’s commodities. Similarly, *image 5* depicts a sexualized America which encounters a European conqueror who shows through visual elements –the cross and a compass–, the importance of religion and the early stages of capitalism. *Image 6* has explicit content as its title *The Reward of Labour and Diligence* divides the notion of the planet as a sphere that can be conquered through labor and depicts its spirit, and nature, as a woman who feeds a baby possibly representing not just the working force but creating a sense of future prosperity for humankind. It is interesting to notice how these depictions respond to a common understanding of a political stage creating an aesthetic canon. Within this context, I titled my research project *The Gendered Planet*.



Image 4. Wierix, H. (1563 - before 1619). *Kindertijd*. [Engraving]. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum.



Image 5. Galle, T. (1537–1612). *Nova Reperta America*. [Engraving]. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art & London: British Museum.



Image 6. Galle, T. (1572). *The Reward of Labour and Diligence*. [Engraving].
 New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art & London: British Museum.

Engaging with feminist contemporary art. To materialize this interdisciplinary project, I sought inspiration from artists engaged with past and contemporary feminist artworks. For example, I used the Guerrilla Girls, Steiner & Kruger to incorporate facts in the playing cards also in relation to contemporary art using advertising as an artistic language. Specifically, my project incorporated the Guerilla Girls methodologies of data-collection in artworks to express socio-political artistic concepts to the art world and beyond. Also, I followed the use of art as education of artist and educator

Steiner who utilizes eco-feminist statements and images of contemporary visual culture in her artworks. Her installation *The Patriarchy is a Pyramid Scheme* (2008) where she shows through photographs women's bodies in contemporary visual culture. In addition to that, I believe Steiner is a relevant artist reference to my project because in the case of video game visuals, they condense and illustrate the bold masculinization of the politics of aesthetics toward our bodies. In fact, the examples of video games –such as *Hitman* (2014), *Assassin's Creed* (2012), *Red Redemption* (2010), *Fallout Vegas* (2010), and *Dishonored* (2012) – represent the latest contemporary imagery examples of how patriarchal politics continue to colonize the female body in order to accumulate power and wealth.

Even if some artists are not in the sphere of feminist contemporary art, I also used Raad's *Mapping Sitting* (2015) which involves deconstructing a power structure; it inspired the concept map *The Gendered Planet*. In the same vein, when I started this project, I designed an online archive that looks more like a collage wall of gender violence in western visual culture including excerpts of video games animations, and film. When designing the playing cards' aesthetics, I thought of Jaar's artwork *Shadows* (2014) to play with the absence of a human figure within a context. Then, also by Jaar, *The Geometry of Conscience* (2010), inspired me to apply the idea of assembling images as an archive. I decided to remove the women's body figures from the oppressive context in which they were placed. I did this to express the idea of absence and quantity. In addition to them, I got inspiration from Kaphar's work as well.

c. Study Design: Sorceress's Resources

The study used multi-methods research which included: (a) a collection of visuals and information on a process journal, (b) a conceptual map, (c) an online archive, (d) a pilot study/survey, (e) a toolkit, and (f) case study research. First, to understand the connections of 'this problem that has no name' (Friedan, 1963), I broadened my creative research practice by applying the method 'unfolding practice' shown in *image 7*, as suggested in *Unfolding Practice, Reflections on Learning and Teaching* by authors Mistry & Elkin. I used this method to register observations, collect facts, brainstorm ideas, write

reflections, make connections and structure the research concept in a self-made accordion book. This technique facilitates an overview of the process that can be unfolded in different nonlinear directions (up, down, forward, backward). Second, I used my accordion book to make a concept map shown in *image 8* and visualize the intersections of patriarchy, capitalism, and some of the causes of the Anthropocene epoch. Third, I did a pilot study and survey to collect information and design the final toolkit. Finally, following the ideas of Nochlin, this project collects a series of images from the history of art to expose the social construction of the representation of women's bodies according to men's needs (1998). Due to the high number of images found in Western visual culture, whose content includes scenes of rape, I decided to frame *The Gendered Planet* (*image 9-12*) visuals on the topic of gender violence throughout western visual culture from the XVI century up to the now. The archive's first installation is shown in *image 9* and can be accessed as a pedagogical resource at: <https://thegenderedplanet.wordpress.com/>

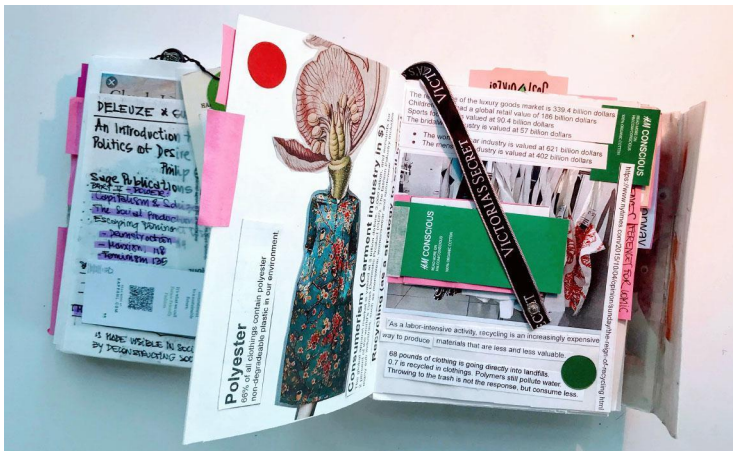


Image 7. Balzi Costa, L. 2018. *Research journal details.*

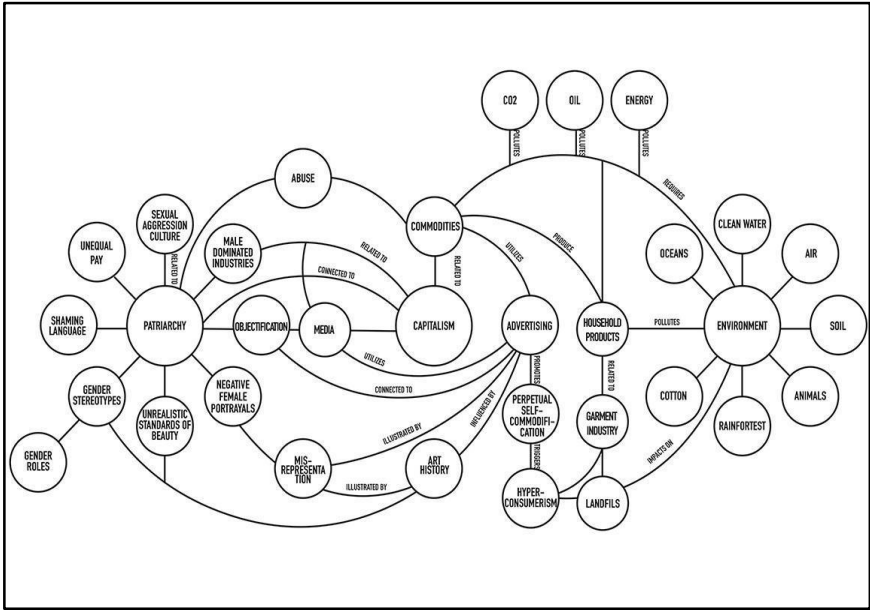


Image 8. Balzi Costa. L. Concept Map.

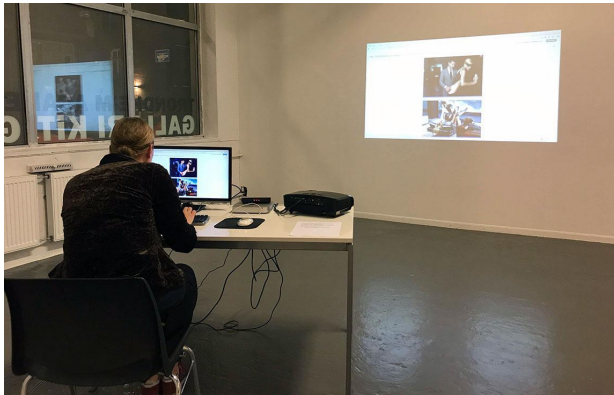


Image 11. Balzi Costa. L. 2018-2019. *Not my King (toolkit)*. *The Gendered Planet*. [Set of playing cards].



Image 12. Balzi Costa. L. 2018-2019. *Not my King (toolkit)*. *The Gendered Planet*. [Set of playing cards].

Case study

a. Participants and locations

The participants for this case study were the attending audience at the opening of the exhibition *Burning Bridges* shown in *image 2*, where this project was installed. It consisted of the general public of a wide range of ages (16-70). The location for this case study was Gramønla Museum Trondheim in May 2019. I also tested the toolkit in other places including students and professors from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, participants from POPUP Feministhus Trondheim shown in *image 14* and guest visitors who came to the Alumni NYU Show curated by feminist artist Martha Wilson shown in *image 13*.



Image 13. Balzi Costa, L. 2019. NYU Art Alumni Show 2019 Curated by Martha Wilson. New York.

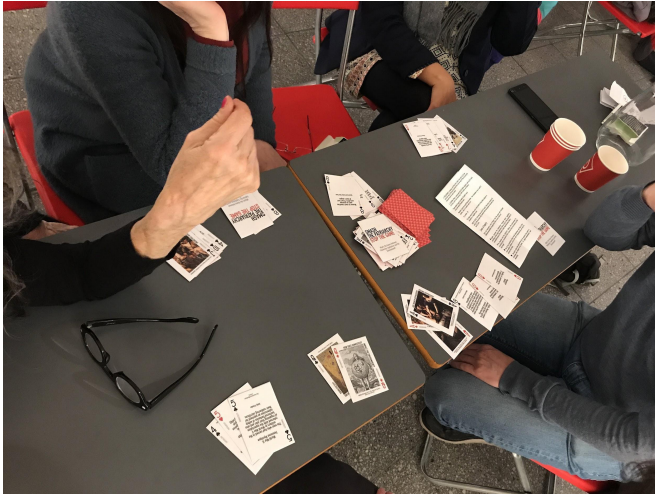


Image 14. Balzi Costa, L. 2018. Popup Feministhus Trondheim.

b. Breaking the capitalist spell: the toolkit as a conversation prompt

The materials I were inspired by a playful experience that responds to a simple game whose patriarchal aesthetic is ironically reused to create awareness of policies that create oppressive aesthetics. The toolkit *Not my King* includes three game instructions as described in *table 2*. It focuses on three main conceptual areas shown in *table 1* to dismantle and expose the structure of a patriarchal-capitalist pattern. Highlights of it are shown in *images 3, 10 and 11*.

Card suits as lines of inquiry. The first area connects to the history of art oppressive aesthetics regarding women's bodies since it was used as source of inspiration in advertising. The second area is linked to the appropriation and reproduction of these aesthetics that implicitly profit from gendered stereotypes (Nussbaum, 1995; Nochlin, 1971; French & Bliss, 2010). An example can be seen in some of Rubens' paintings depicting women as sexual objects which in a way resemble Playboy aesthetics. The third area consists of neocolonial forms that are exported as part of the post-digital culture in a globalized economy creating new oppressive identities for women, worldwide.

Description of the cards with images and statements. In the toolkit, I included a selection of images to expose how mainly advertising but also the film industry and videogames – in the hands of leading economies such as that of the United States – uses stereotypes to model new social identities. This pressure to control consumers can be traced through a pattern of gendered stereotyped roles that mutated prior to, and after, World War II, changing women's social identities (Friedan, 1963).

More recently, in the case of the video games the user can take an active role as a woman-killer and get points for it. In the playing card set, each suite is structured with questions, images, and excerpts from quantitative and qualitative research. The texts are citations from academics cited in this paper's reference section.

The cards are described in *table 1* and *table 2*. A highlight of the full deck can be seen in *image 1*, *image 3*, *image 11*, and *image 13*. The principles that guided the selection of citations, including images in the cards, respond to the lines of inquiry of the intersections between patriarchy, capitalism, and the environment. There are questions on the A, K, Q, and J cards that serve as prompts for discussion while playing with the cards. Regarding the card' images, I applied the contemporary art concept of appropriation inside a patriarchal structure since the game has a king, queen, and prince but there is no princess in it.

The jokers have been replaced by different women's bodies removed from their original artwork context. They can be used as a wild unique card in the deck. I acknowledge that this has its pros and cons, but I did it on purpose to keep the game open and explore a variety of performances.

Table 1
[Lines of inquiry]

Suits	Line of Inquiry
♠ Spade	It represents the mechanisms through which capitalism articulates a wide range of industries whose focus is the exploration of commodities based on the women's body objectification theory.
♦ Diamond	It tracks how patriarchy is linked to capitalism and affects the environment by promoting hyper-consumerism with a special focus on women as their main target.
♣ Clover	It represents all the assumptions in connection to social behavior such as negative traditions like the cult of domesticity , which is still hard to question.
♥ Heart	It collects data about patriarchy to expose how power is structured and connects to the issues of hyper-consumerism and domesticity.

Table 2**[Game instructions]**

Game Title	Instruction	Objective
LAID THE KINGS [Game]	To put (or meld) your cards, except the Kings (The Kings have a negative impact on the final counting), into runs and sets. The first person who manages to make his or her whole hand into combinations one way or another, with one card remaining to discard, wins the game.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To discuss issues regarding the politics of aesthetics of women's bodies in western neoliberal culture. ii. To create awareness of the connections between patriarchy, capitalism, and the Anthropocene. iii. To disrupt traditional spaces for feminist education in the art context. iv. To challenge representation hierarchies in the visual arts.
TIMELINE + ARCHIVE [Play]	Find all the cards with images and arrange them by year (the small type at the bottom). Use the jokers to find and match from where they have been decontextualized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To understand how the oppressive politics of aesthetics have continuity from the XVII to the present. ii. To learn to see what the women's body position tells out of the context in which it was placed originally.

HOUSE OF CARDS [Play]	Make a pyramid with the cards! Is it a house of cards, a power pyramid, or both?	i. To create a 3 d structure and analyze its meaning in relation to patriarchy, capitalism, and the Anthropocene.
TAROT READING [Play]	Make a simple question such as, “What am I supposed to learn today?”. Shuffle and reset your cards. Cut the deck into 3’s and reorder them. When you feel ready, keep the cards face down. Try a 3 card tarot spread: the past, present, and future spread. Take the top card from your shuffled deck, and reveal them one by one, left to right. Get tarot meanings from tarot cards and their positions. How does the meaning of the card interact with the question you are answering?	i. To create awareness about the power structure from the politics of patriarchal capitalism in our lives.
CREATE YOUR OWN GAME and/or PLAY	What games can you play with these cards?	i. To continue the research on the role of play in Feminist education in the art context.

c. Games, plays, and performance

These games and plays have different lines of inquiry to address the fact that the notion of the new commons is not separated from the working force and the capitalist interests. (Federici & Linebaugh, 2018). Personally, I find it fascinating when people come up with their own games and rules or play with

no rules at all. An example of coming up with audience-led game rules can be found in Revuelta's (2015) play card game *Playtime* (2015) and the book *Do it. The Compendium* (2013) with instructions to start an activist action. Revuelta suggests different pedagogical instructional frames focusing on concrete problems utilizing games, plays, and performance. Also, important and in connection to dissecting capitalism as a power structure, are *Bordergames. Sabotaje contra el capital pasándoselo pipa (SCCPP)* from the collective La Fiambrera Obrera (2005). The work addresses the capitalist system with a focus on consumerism and environmental issues as well as the problem of eviction in Spain. These ideas utilize games to foster discussions as starting points for activist performances, motivated me to produce this work.

Games and plays. The idea of the activities is to have a familiar game to shuffle a deck of cards, so the enjoyment of the game derives from the obstructions of rules. Another option is a play that consists of trying to make a house of cards that resembles a power pyramid and analyzing what that structure means within the themes of patriarchy, capitalism, and the environment. In addition, it is possible to set the cards in a timeline that can also be read as a gender-violence small visual archive. Last, this deck of cards can also be used in different ways –such as tarot reading, creating a two or three-dimensional shape, etc. The idea of repetition in this project is a plus, thus it can bring a wide range of insights to the research of games in feminist education within the art context. The instructions were printed on additional cards and are described in *table 2*. They guide the players to articulate different games and plays – such as the traditional Rummy, where they can meld and discharge cards– but with altered rules based on including familiar concepts to host understanding (Campbell, 2019, pp. 59-70).

Tarot reading as performance. The role of tarot reading in the exhibition, shown in *image 2* was to create an active space to attract the audience. The cards were also displayed and to have an optional activity and break the ice between the audience in the traditional art space of museums and art galleries. A signpost list was left on a side table where the main installation was placed.

The audience signed up during the opening of the exhibition and the tarot reader answering the participant's questions interpreting the cards' content parodying and challenging the occult symbolism of capitalist and patriarchal mechanisms embedded in our lives.

d. Curatorial perspective

Museums contributed positioning women as objects throughout history and this fact is ironic because these institutions are now re-humanizing women as subjects (Fusco, 1994, pp. 143-167). As a result, *The Gendered Planet* artistic research project was exhibited at Gramønla Contemporary Art Museum Trondheim in May 2019. It consists of an installation of ludic space in which the toolkit was the main piece. In this setting, I brought Golding's (2010) who argues that even in the globalized museum social context of the now, museums retain the idea of power because they are understood by the audience as hierarchical spaces for accessing knowledge. So, the idea of participatory involvement of the audience with imagery including issues of intersectionality in feminism was my first approach to deconstructing the ethnocentric male gaze of looking at art while bringing to the ground hierarchical ideas of power management in poetics and politics.

Literature review: What is the role of play in the art context to discuss the political aesthetics of women's bodies in neoliberal Western visual culture?

In order to put into practice Federici's (2012), Nochlin's (1998), and Nussbaum's (1995) ideas on the politics of women's bodies, I believe play served as a bridge to host critical pedagogy discussions in art spaces. Historically, museums taught the audience to look and be silent. The role of art in a system of patronage is not different from how art functions in twenty-first-century investment capitalism because western visual imagery is not used differently in Ruben's oil painting than it is in advertising.

To support this idea, Nochlin's seven essays on *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (1988) critique the canonization of great artists. She argues

against the stereotyped morphologies in paintings and proposes to look at visual art through the intersection of class and gender. She further explains how coloniality supported patriarchal visual discourses on women's body appropriation and therefore entitlement to possess it. Similarly, in an interview regarding food, politics Federici (Haiven, November 3, 2009) arguments on reproduction and free labor place the institutionalization of rape and prostitution, and witch-hunt as the core of a methodical subjugation of women and appropriation of their labor. These mindless politics are structured in Nussbaum's analysis of objectification describing the dehumanization of women (1995) and Langton's additions to Nussbaum's list. For example, considering Nussbaum's objectification theory, the history of art visuals of this project exposes the women's body "instrumentality, the denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity" (Nussbaum, 1995). As a reference, in the past, the master plan for women's domesticity was the creation of the stereotype of a witch to ensure mass hysteria and panic in the population so it would be easier to persecute disruptive women who refused to be domesticated at that time.

a. How do we engage in play, how does behavior become play, and what happens when these are placed in the art context?

In her book *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* Flanagan (2009) explains in the act of playing critically there is not just fun but a negotiation of power underlying the idea of competition. Play is a medium to exchange roles and create fictional spaces and aspects of learning. I also agree that even if the games and play I propose have rules, the players could interpret them as guidelines for alternative situations. Regarding the idea of critical play, Flanagan explains that what it means is to facilitate a view on a specific content—in the case of this research, the intersections of capitalism, patriarchy, and the Anthropocene. She adds that there is a challenge in terms of where the play is hosted as the environment might be connected to the play. The proposed games and plays are interventions to our visual culture through the treatment of the imagery selected that is printed on the cards.

The toolkit *Not my King* follows Flanagan's idea on subversion. For example, this happens when posing questions on the cards about the gender

imbalance in video games. The idea of breaking colonialism in museums and dissecting the politics of representation in women's bodies is the motivation for this research. But engaging the audience to play and start a conversation represents a challenge every time I mediated a session with the playing cards. Traditionally, we have been taught to read artworks' statements leaving no place for interaction with the audience rather than being a spectator. How do we engage in play, how does behavior become play, and what happens when these are placed in the art context? Play is an ice-breaking barrier toward the coloniality of space, shapes, and forms perceived in museums. Campbell suggests in *Ludic practice: the case for student play in university museums* (2019, pp. 59-70) that a ludic practice is a way to connect museum objects with the audience. She adds that teaching through activities that include familiar concepts such as card games facilitates understanding of the themes discussed. Sharp analyzes how artists create games and the potential games have as and in art. This project integrates two of Sharp's categories from his book *Works of Game: On the Aesthetics of Games and Art* (2015). The second category he describes as using games as an expressive art form, and the third one is through which artists create games as a medium. I find Sharp's description of categories conditioning the interdisciplinary approaches of creativity that we artists have. However, he describes the generalities of the project of how the cards are an artwork that functions as a dialogic tool incorporating ludic pedagogy.

Drobnick & Fisher analyze in *Shuffling the Collection: Card Decks as Museum Interventions* (2018, pp. 171-180) the idea of how cards can promote the interaction between the audience and the artworks in art spaces through tactical actions. Alternative objects such as cards are portable, foster playful situations, and suggest a variety of views on collections. The visitors can play in the art space, at home, and provoke a change in how art is perceived. Drobnick and Fisher's research on cards supports the idea of the role of play in also disrupting traditional colonial approaches to looking at art in museums. For example, in my project, the tarot reading alternates personal inquiries with how the politics of neoliberal visual culture impact the viewer's life. Another example that illustrates this statement is that the cards propose to examine the history of art from paintings to video games by looking through the oppression

of women based on race, class, and gender categorizations. I suggest that my cards should also be used beyond the instructions I designed. The cards can also function as educational flashcards and other alternative games in connection to museum artworks.

b. How does this project bring together conversations about the intersections of patriarchy, capitalism (and the Anthropocene)?

Our gendered planet Earth that itself is suffering from being raped by an endless desire for appropriation and women's bodies – my body– are still caught up in a patriarchal, globalized neo-liberal Western power system. The Western male-gaze that condensed the political aesthetics oppressing women's bodies led us to this designation of an Anthropocene epoch: “a geological era defined by unprecedented human-made disturbances over earth's ecologies” (Stromberg, 2013).

In *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, Schiebinger (1993) has a strong argument about early colonialist images. In the seventeenth century, botany was tight to medicine including plants' power. After that, in parallel to the colonization of the Americas, a new order redefined how we know the world through categories linked to reproduction as exclusively male. She suggests that the use of hypersexual metaphor in science not only remains until the 19th century but is also used nowadays to describe reproduction privileges as hierarchical roles in a natural system (pp. 13-30). Similarly, the sexual division of labor, the commodities took to Europe from the Americas, mostly coming from plants promoted the idea of a gendered science that Schiebinger suggests. The gendered planet illustrates these politics by dissecting the images representing the commodification of women up to now.

Haraway describes in her book *Making Kin in the Chthulucene* that the ‘Capitalocene’ (2015, p. 51) –the 3rd carbon age– could function as a fictional scenario to stay with the trouble by applying new practices. The author, in her own words, suggests that “imagination, resistance, revolt to repair and mourn the negative vision while thinking: What if we didn't invent capitalism?”. Similarly, Le Guin proposes that alternative ways of understanding the world and the so-called progress, reshape our sense of how the world works to

decolonize the future as a space simply because we don't own it. I agree with Le Guin (1997) and Haraway (2015) who suggest changing the story of the multifaceted Gaia –planet Earth– which in Haraway's words "... is not a person but complex systemic phenomena that compose a living planet" (p.43). In the toolkit *Not my King*, the idea of a gendered planet is challenged when discussing the intersections of the lines of inquiry from looking closer at the history of art. Since the colonization of the Americas the idea of a gendered planet in which women were perceived as commodities (Federici, 2012; Schiebinger, 1993 & Nochlin, 1998) is used in this toolkit to start dissecting and understanding how the witch hunt was also intrinsically connected to racism. That said, I thought of Ladson-Billings (1998) who states that to challenge the oppressor and its white privilege, naming the stories of the oppressed can provide a voice for women of color, to start questioning the rationale of the constructed power structure. In many cultural institutions the audience is not taught to change the homogenized male-gaze nor to discuss white privilege so the creation of stereotypes in artworks from western culture (p. 24, p. 33) persists. However, by bringing the critical race theoretical approaches to education in the context of art spaces where there's a 'color blind perspective', a change of perspective can be activated.

But this is not enough. More fictional and equally balanced scenarios of gender roles need to be created in order to challenge the colonial construction of gender in the art context and our visual culture.

Study report

This action is meant to be repeated so I would probably change the table design by providing instructions to engage the audience in different games and plays. Any game or play can be performed against the rules and the results could be used to inform future practices of performances with cards.

a. What are the insights of this project in the art context?

Within different audiences, the game articulated different conversations. An example of this was the testing phase where I used the feedback given to design the final toolkit. Results of the different sessions showed that, even if the audience gathers educated women, feminists, or men –who also consider

themselves feminists—, most of the participants—including myself at the time of doing the research— were not fully aware of how capitalism operates in terms of the politics behind its aesthetics.

The tarot reader applied traditional tarot reading skills and the interesting thing is that the participants' reading of their future was always conditioned by capitalism. Other settings include Popup Feministhus Trondheim shown in *image 14* and the NYU *Art Alumni Show 2019* curated by Wilson shown in *image 13*. In both places, the participants suggested that they would be interested to play on their own rules. As a result, the toolkit *Not my King* can be played in different art contexts and the insights will vary depending on the participant's interests.

For example, when participants, in a game session, read a card with information about the 'pink tax' (2016), I observed how three players—who belong to a feminist organization— said that they were not aware of how industries tax women's products with an overpriced, when compared to men's similar products. More, in both sessions, participants who chose to consume organic products and select their clothing based on the sustainable materials shown on the labels, recognized that they were also consuming products made with cheap labor when purchasing fast-fashion brands. As a result, the toolkit game of Rummy, facilitated the audience with strong connections between patriarchy and capitalism with some difficulties to understand how mainly female consumers and aesthetics are connected to the Anthropocene. An example showing the extent of the problem of consumption in relation to the Anthropocene is cited in the article *Environmental Impact Assessment of Household Consumption* (Ivanova, Stadler, Steen Olsen, Wood, Vita, Tukker & Hertwich, 2015). It relates to how the garment industry and household products are on the top list of most contaminated industries after CO2 and meat production. This data also shows that women are the major consumers of household and clothing products.

These conversations helped the audience to create awareness about their position as consumers and opened some additional questions such as: What are our options as consumers to escape the intersections of capitalism and patriarchy? How can we challenge neoliberal strategies whose politics of aesthetics have a direct impact on women's health and the planet?

Conclusion

Art games designed by artists are ludic tools to open dialogues applying critical pedagogy. Thinking of pedagogical insights, the role of play in the art context to discuss women's body aesthetics in the neoliberal western visual culture is a successful experience to rethink the role of museums as educational spaces. Even if my first attempt as a novice artist did not engage as many people as expected, it created a bridge between the knowledge people bring into insightful discussions, our cultural biases and individualistic approaches to creating and observing art. Play is social interaction and the installation strategy aimed to provide instructions of one game example. However, there could also be a different approach to clarify that there is also freedom for players to play by breaking the rules if they want to do so. The conversations that the toolkit brings do not offer a solution but ground that helps us to cope with the Anthropocene.

The texts included in the cards are rigid information that I would like the participants to use, question, and connect so they create a sense of making new stories of who we are as consumers in this neoliberal system. As Haraway (2015) cites in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (p. 64): "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds; what worlds make stories" (p. 34). Understanding how the neoliberal power system operates behind the aesthetics of the Western visual culture, could help consumers identify its connections to the Anthropocene age. For example, reminding the audience that the neo-liberal and globalized economy depends on underdeveloped countries because its profit is based on taking advantage of the lack of environmental and gender equality policies. These industries employ cheap labor, creating pollution and water stress, among other environmental issues. Not just that, they also need to create the consumers' dependance by using advertising. Because of this, we should not overlook how

these issues intersect. Advocating for gender equality means to create awareness in consumers and especially privileged women due to their power of acquisition and influence in the neoliberal economy. Could art games and plays in art spaces help to move an audience's interest' as consumers, from geopolitics to a social economy? Perhaps, the idea of repetition in this research project not only nurtures itself from each context in which the cards are used for playing a game but also extends its scope as a possible activist art game. I suggest keeping on playing an active role as artists to emancipate our visual culture from the oppressive aesthetics regarding women's bodies.

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