



... To be hidden does not mean to be merely  
revealed – Part 2 Artistic research on hidden  
curriculum

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*This text revisits the long-term project Hidden Curriculum (HC), initiated by Annette Krauss, that addresses unquestioned routines, hierarchies of knowledge and the role of the body in learning processes from the perspective of secondary/high school education (in the research on a hidden curriculum). The first part of this text ([www.medienimpulse.at/articles/view/848](http://www.medienimpulse.at/articles/view/848)) entailed a deeper analysis of educational studies on the phenomenon of hidden curriculum in relation to the feminist and critical pedagogies of bell hooks, Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière. The aim of the second part is to address academic canons and corporeality within educational settings and to investigate the physicality of everyday norms through revisiting the framework, results and processes of the*

*collaborative research of the HC project with secondary/high school students.*

## 1. The physicality of education

The HC project operates in close connection to discussions around hidden curriculum in educational studies and important features in feminist critical pedagogy. On the one hand these discourses provide the backdrop against which artistic research into hidden curriculum can take form. On the other this research project challenges its backdrop, that is, the assumptions about who is learning, teaching and researching. A prominent example of this challenge is the vital role of student collaboration and engagement in the HC project. The importance of their involvement not merely in terms of learning but researching and teaching intervenes in the hierarchies of knowledge inherent to our understanding of these roles. Taking the students' engagement in knowledge processes seriously reveals yet another important aspect of the HC project, an aspect neglected in hidden curriculum studies and which finds only marginal attention in critical pedagogies: the blind spot with respect to the role of the body in schooling situations. In the following I elaborate on how the particular research described herein on hidden curriculum attempts to expand the discussions on hierarchy in schooling situations with a focus on the physicality of education.

Since the first HC workshop series in 2007, there has been a strong motivation on the part of students to use performative strategies and interventions as a way of 'thinking by doing.' Working with performative situations and body-related interventions as investigative research has become extremely important for the project. The reasons vary: the project's embeddedness in the field of art raised specific expectations by all participants (including myself, students, teachers) toward the methods we would come up with that would push beyond those typical of classroom learning environments. Those environments more strictly adhere to the space of the classroom itself, and avoid looking into the conventions and unwritten rules of school as institution. At the same time

the expectations on the side of the arts-informed participants (curators, artists, art teachers) were shaped by engagement in 'artistic research methods' and representations of knowledge claims in artistic research.[1] Taking these two positions on research into account, those of the classroom and those associated with art, the HC project saw that its context necessarily influences its methods and research outcomes. These expectations allowed the collaborative research to take on forms and adopt methods (see figure 3, exercise 'Collectively Rocking Chairs') from the fields of study (artistic practice, educational studies, and feminist theory and practice) that this artistic research is entangled with as well as the project conditions. Artistic research in my approach involved a more explorative participation in knowledge processes in classroom situations that reconsiders both intellectual and physical behaviour. These conditions and circumstances enabled participants to address body politics at play in school, its inherent hierarchies and forms of governance. In this sense the conditions that frame artistic research made it possible to tackle the physicality of education, namely the participants' (students', teachers', artists') bodies in practical interaction with their material and discursive environments.



*Figure 4*

'Chairs Exercise,' photos

(Quintin Kynaston School), London, 2012.

Courtesy Hidden Curriculum/Invisibilities.

Figure 4: The images depict a group of students interacting with school chairs against their usual uses of these objects. The students documented their findings. The so-called 'Chairs Exercise' is an example of how the physicality of education has been approached in the HC project.



*Figure 5*

'In-Between Spaces,' photos  
(Gerrit Rietveld College), Utrecht, 2007.  
Courtesy Hidden Curriculum.

Figure 5: Here students set off to investigate the school building, finding ways to approach it differently. They tried to gain information about the building's spaces, using only their bodies as tools, by for instance measuring space by arm length or body height. They looked for what they later called 'in-between spaces,' seeking the gaps within the building that

were unused, inconvenient, uncomfortable – the forbidden and hidden spaces. They entered into these and documented their findings.

An important aspect of the HC project is that the students get to know each other's methods, approaches and findings. This forms an important thread of discussion and exchange within the project and between different groups of participants and schools across different places and times. In this sense both examples (figure 4 and 5) are precursors to the 'Collectively Rocking Chairs' (figure 3) and 'Chair Hierarchies' (figure 2) exercises discussed in part 1 of this essay. Many discussions and actions revolving around the use of chairs in schools led to the examples shown above. The students investigated their sitting practices and spoke on how these are to a large extent due to implicit codes in everyday practices rather than the result of intentional choices. In one of these sessions, a group of students brought up the relations between chair, table and body: 'When sitting at a table our legs just fit underneath it. Nobody pays attention to the space under the desk, neither myself nor the teachers. That's really irrelevant. What is important in school are the books, the papers on the table, our hands and heads. That's the way school makes us sit at the table.'<sup>[2]</sup> What this quote points to is that in the everyday experience of school, both the space under the desk and the students' bodies including their legs go completely unacknowledged. The books or pieces of paper on top of the desk, the hands and heads are the main foci. How students sit with and on their chairs, while at a table, renders the part of their bodies irrelevant to school processes invisible. However, it is especially this part of the body and associated pieces of furniture that became interesting to the students: they carefully considered the relations between chair, table, and body, and extended this consideration to the school building. By investigating their daily walking, standing and use of the building patterns, they were made more aware of the building. They then tried to find areas they did not use, or had not thought to use (figure 5).

Through these investigations the students made the school's space tangible, drawing attention to a hidden level of complicity between spatial

arrangements, bodies, and daily routines of behaving and thinking. The students' description of their spatial settings and body practices correlates with the Cartesian body-mind split. School's focus on mental processes reflects the students' observation that its spaces emphasize the upper part of the body (especially heads, hands), whereas the rest of the body is hidden under the table. By observing themselves and their colleagues the students began to critically address how they deal with everyday rules and conventions and how they internalize these or (unconsciously) resist them.

## 2. Michel Foucault an docile bodies ...



Working with implicit, regulatory activities in the context of school, Michel Foucault's well-known concept of the docile body becomes relevant. He premises this on the human body's capacity for 'docility,' (Foucault 1977, p. 136ff) referring to the acquisition of social abilities that are 'not biologically given,' that is, to learn social skills of all kinds. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault states that by the end of the seventeenth century forms of disciplining were directed at the individual subject in context of prisons, schools and hospitals. The aim was to optimize the power of the individual body, specifically its usefulness. According to Foucault, the production of a docile body, a useful body, not only involves direct bodily regulations in the form of punishment; the 'tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms' that he calls 'disciplines' (Foucault 1977, p. 222) were also crucial. In comparing school with a 'learning machine' (Foucault 1977, p. 147) Foucault brings together the tiny, everyday forces that control and condition the bodies, as occurs at school, such as spatial distribution in the form of cellular arrangements (classrooms, tables, benches and chairs) or temporal distributions as with rhythms produced through time tables. Through these means the subject both gradually internalizes imposed control while becoming socialized as a subject. Foucault responds to the question of the relation between imposed control mechanism and internalization process with the principle of visibility that he sees productive for many areas in society. This becomes particularly clear in his usage of the architectural figure of the panopticon. The panopticon is designed as a circular building with an observation tower in the centre of a space surrounded by a wall of jail cells. The inmates can be seen at any point, whereas the guards in the tower stay invisible. In the words of Foucault, 'disciplinary power is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility' (Foucault 1977, p. 187). Through the invisibility of the guards, the inmates direct the prison guard's gaze back at themselves, and submit themselves to the social order of the prison. This mechanism is important because it deindividuates and automatizes power structures. Power is not so much to be found in a person, but 'in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose

internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up' (Foucault 1977, p. 202).

These insights have been formative for theories on subject formation in post-structuralist feminism (e.g., Braidotti 1994, Butler 1993). Accordingly, power cannot be solely understood on the basis of domination, as something that is possessed and deployed by individuals. Power is understood as a strategic relation of forces that infuses life and produces new forms of desires, relations, objects and discourses (Foucault 1983, p. 212). Moreover, the subject, Foucault argues, does not precede power relations, but rather is produced through these relations. Central to his formulation is the concept and paradox of *subjectivation*: the very processes that enforce a subject's subordination and correlation to certain norms are the conditions through which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent (Foucault 1983, p. 208–225). Foucault's understanding of power is important for educational settings, because it neither sees the students and teachers in school as blank pages for social inscription, nor as omnipotent masters of educational processes. Foucault's understanding of power does not reside in *either* subordination *or* resistance and freedom, but rather tries to move beyond this binary construction through *both* subordination *and* resistance.

We can find this also in Henry Giroux's hidden curriculum studies as well as in hooks's feminist pedagogies (see part 1). They each claim that classroom situations have to be understood as *both* reproduction *and* transformation (hooks 1994, p. 207/Giroux 1983, p. 61). This links back to the students' engagement in the HC project; what the students touched upon is the implicit knowledge in practices and objects in school that are hard to grasp as they are hidden in their common everydayness. This implicit knowledge is part of everyday life in school and shapes the way we relate to each other and to objects in school. On a more general level the students' investigations give rise to the question as to whether the way we sit on a chair actually shapes (and restricts) the way we think and how we know these chairs. Moreover, through the investigative performances, the students do not only ask what a hidden curriculum

and the implicit knowledge could mean for them. Just as important, they examine what a hidden curriculum does in the realm of the school: how it is connected to their bodies, material environment, and processes of subordination and transformation.

In focusing on the physicality of education it is not enough to pay attention to the discursivity of the body. It is necessary to understand learning processes at school as being inscribed in the bodily practice of learning itself. That is, the 'educational work' (Bourdieu 1977, p. 205) that people deploy on themselves in direct interaction with their material environment and which are deeply saturated by power relations. Consequently 'the act of practising and learning physical postures corresponds to the formation of internal worldviews and vice versa.' (Alkemeyer 2008, p. 53) Not to decide for one in favour of the others (materiality, practice, discourse) has been the foremost task in the research into hidden curriculum. This approach makes it possible to have an account of the lived experience and material element of the body without abandoning social construction. At its base is an understanding that ascribes a force to bodies. This force can influence the social life of the subject's body that is entangled with the forces that a practice-related or discursive system provokes.[3] This attention to the entanglement of the material, practical and discursive side of learning in school makes it possible to problematize an oversimplified understanding of what constitutes a body in a learning situation. It enables a critique of the Cartesian body-mind split that is inherent in schooling processes, with its preoccupation with mental processes and blindness to and devaluation of the physicality of education.

So far many discussions and actions in the HC project have circled around the way chairs and tables are used in school and how these become agents in shaping bodies and worldviews. In school, chairs and tables fill whole rooms. Students and teachers are in constant interaction with them. But, as we have seen, they seem hardly visible in the actual learning processes in schools: important neither to established pedagogies nor to hidden curriculum studies.

### 3. Queer Phenomenology

The role of tables in the context of studying is also addressed by Sara Ahmed in 'Queer Phenomenology' (2006). Ahmed uses tables as tools and objects of study in order to philosophically discuss how the bodies of individuals are directed toward objects. She investigates how these 'orientations' in relation to certain objects shape the way we understand the world, what we see and do not see. She asserts that philosophy is actually full of tables. They are the objects upon which philosophy is written. However, the way they are used in writing, needs further scrutiny. She starts from Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach and his way of investigating the writing table which 'is the object nearest the body of the philosopher.' (Ahmed 2006, p. 3) Thus it seems unsurprising that tables on which writing takes place appears in writing. Yet what makes her elaborations so useful for this chapter on the physicality of education, is exactly the nexus that she explores, namely how an individual's understanding of the world is entangled with the objects toward which he or she is 'oriented' in daily life. Ahmed is interested in doing this via phenomenology because of the importance of lived experience, the relationship between consciousness and objects, and the significance of repeated and habitual practices that shape bodies and worldviews. It allows her to theorize 'how something becomes given by not being the object of perception' (Ahmed 2012, p. 21) which I understand as the interrogation of how a reality becomes a taken for granted by becoming the background. Ahmed is not interested in a 'proper' (Ahmed 2006, p. 2) phenomenological approach, but rather goes along with the etymology of the word 'queer' which means twisted and off-centre, in order to explore how bodies become oriented through repetitive practices in relation to objects. Ahmed grounds her claim of not doing 'proper' phenomenological work – but queering it – in interdisciplinarity. She argues that the 'promise of interdisciplinary scholarship is that the failure to return texts to their histories will do something.' (Ahmed 2006, p. 22)

A common denominator can be found in how 'bodies as well as objects take shape through being oriented towards each other.' (Ahmed 2006, p. 54) Orientation is always a two-sided approach. When we touch a table, the table touches us as well.[4] Important to note, orientation produces exclusions, it makes constituent participants invisible and exercises power. Husserl neither included nor theorized the domestic work that made his work at and with his writing table possible. Ahmed argues that he performed a leap into the universal by replacing 'this table' with 'the table.' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 35) He did not recognize that the ones having a place at 'the table' are white, male, heterosexual bodies.

Taking up one of Ahmed's tables to think with, I return to 'Collectively Rocking Chairs' (figure 3). As discussed in part 1 of this essay, the students had been occupied with investigating the usage of chairs and tables in school and the attached power structures. One way of looking at these included their use in group discussions and other classroom situations. The students suggested 'Collectively Rocking Chairs' as a way of intervening in classroom routines of learning, which became central to the HC project. One constellation saw students create a classroom routine of learning via roundtable discussions. I was puzzled by the students' choice of this format of discussion instead of the more obvious, 'frontal-teaching' method. Their choice sparked many discussions and prompted me to do further research in this direction, not least of all because the roundtable format is one of my preferred discussion arrangements in workshop settings.

Thinking alongside Ahmed, a roundtable is also a working table, but can be only thought of in a collective, often semi-public, constellation. A roundtable can function as a dinner table in the private sphere, which is then called a round table (two words). Functioning as a working table, a roundtable (written as one word) is much bigger and is used in administrative and educational settings. In both functions a roundtable is not meant to be used by a single person, but is arranged for a group. The term 'a roundtable' conflates the form of the table and the spatial arrangement, that is, people sitting 'a-round' the table. The spatial

constellation it demands also induces a change of perspective. In reference to gatherings in which all are accorded an equal status, the term 'roundtable' is a democratic symbol. However, the notion of 'roundtable' is not purely linguistic: it is an embodiment of or 'structural exercise' (Bourdieu 1977, p. 91) in democratic behaviour made anew when individuals perform a roundtable discussion.

Spatial arrangement is important as all practices are performed in relation to their location. This correlation forms the 'structural exercise by which is built up practical mastery of the fundamental schemes.' (Bourdieu 1977, p. 91) In this sense, a roundtable discussion has to be seen as socio-symbolic practice. Advancing the analysis of the circular arrangement of a roundtable can hardly hold its promise of equality, however. As an example, I was part of a series of roundtable discussions connected to my work at the HKU University of the *Arts Utrecht*. The first time I attended I hardly knew anybody. Entering the room where everybody was already seated, I faced an enclosed circular arrangement. Closely seated side by side, it was as if the group had collectively turned their back to the outside world.[5] Once I overcame this obstacle and found my place in the circle, I faced another challenge: the circular order renders the participants visible to each other. One cannot place oneself in the back, which would give a certain protection if needed – especially for a newcomer. Considering the fact that the circular arrangement supports a greater range of visibility for all actors, it certainly privileges those who know how to deal with this visibility or who have the power to use the visibility toward their own ends. In a challenging way it correlates with Foucault's criticism of the dominant paradigm of visibility in Western societies. Through Foucault we can better understand how the paradigm of visibility legitimizes oppressive modes of control in many areas of life but at the same time is also subtly entangled with deeply democratic behaviour, as with roundtable discussions exercised in educational settings.

These elaborations bring to light two things, which I read in close relation to Ahmed's elaboration on examples of socio-spatial embodiments and

the material/practice/discourse formations I pointed toward. Firstly, that a spatial-material arrangement is not independent of the sociopolitical context it is placed in: a roundtable discussion is imbued by the norms and conventions that we as bodies bring to the table. Participating in a roundtable is not only a bodily-structural exercise in democratic behaviour, but also a bodily-structural exercise in the paradigm of visibility that we encounter in Western societies. Secondly, a different socio-spatial order implies different forms of reproduction of inequality; it would be short-sighted to think of a 'democratic' roundtable as neutral. A roundtable enacts a socio-symbolic order that brings with it new (informal) inclusions and exclusions. This has far-reaching consequences for the HC project as revealing a hidden curriculum does not necessarily help overcome inequalities and dominant structures. Foucault and Donna Haraway both underscore that more knowledge does not necessarily help the subject out of subordination or domination. What it can do is change and consequently produce new power relations.

In conclusion I delineate some important aspects of what is to be gained from an artistic research approach with regard to hidden curriculum in secondary/high school:

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1. Investigating complicities in establishing hierarchies of knowledge

One of the main challenges in the HC project is investigating what is regarded as (legitimate) knowledge in the realm of secondary/high school education. It necessarily needs to include studies on hidden curriculum in educational research. While these provide fruitful insights into theorizing a hidden curriculum in school in relation to the social reproduction of inequalities, these studies are deficient when it comes to their own complicity in establishing hierarchies of knowledge. Existing studies on hidden curriculum are almost exclusively undertaken by academic researchers who decide what is important to address. Ideas and visions of students (or teachers) have hardly played a role. Artistic research on

hidden curriculum is then a double intervention: 1) it tries to open up this research to students to actively participate in the discussion of what is regarded as legitimate knowledge, what is neglected or not even recognized as knowledge in school; and 2) practicing and writing about this artistic research challenges educational research that undermines the mutuality of a researcher-student-teacher-relationship. By establishing a research setting that does *not* engage actively with students (and teachers), educational research risks reinstalling hierarchies of knowledge that it (in the framework of critical pedagogies) sets out to challenge.

#### 4.2. When we learn, we learn as bodies

With respect to the HC project I argue that artistic research has the capacity to approach what is taken for granted in school settings and educational research: that is, the physicality of education that surfaced in many workshops over the years. It is no coincidence that the attention to the body in schools has become very prominent within the HC project and has not appeared much in hidden curriculum studies. Artistic research has the potential to expand the frontiers of research (in this case the physicality of education) through its engagement with its research material, framework and design, and its expectations toward outcomes.

#### 4.3. To be hidden does not mean to be merely revealed

Reflecting on the project's title has been quite productive as it was possible to make use of its somewhat misleading character. In setting up it was clear the project was about something hidden, which often elicited the direct response that it must be about revealing the invisible. Taking a closer look at the functions of (in)visibility within society – the different ways we might relate to 'the invisible' and utilize them for our own agendas – is therefore a consideration at risk of getting lost. Bringing together thoughts on (in)visibilities (Foucault) and what we take for granted in relation to our orientation toward objects (Ahmed) produces discussions about the extent to which the visible world around us stays



invisible. What is proposed here is to attend to the continuous presence and production of blind spots. And again it might be simplistic to think of revealing these blind spots, but rather consider how a blind spot might function in a society in which, for example, the dominant paradigm is one of visibility. This is a matter of incorporating in whatever we do, say, write, or read, that it will mean more than, and be different from, what we intend and how we can relate to this, in words but also very practically, in actions and movements.[6]

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### Comments

[1] Here, artistic research is understood as a specific form of artistic practice and as a distinct type of research with its own questions and claims. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt have described this specific form of research as 'practice-led enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary methodologies that have the potential to extend the frontiers of research.' (Barrett & Bolt 2007, p. 4) By combining these features of a practice-based, theoretically driven enquiry that is constituted by personal-political and interdisciplinary methodologies, artistic research generates its very own tools and methods and explores its premises and ways of understanding.

[2] Written during a workshop session in Utrecht, 2008. Translation by author.

[3] With 'bodies' I refer both to the bodies of the students, or any participant in school, as well as any materialities in the school context, such as furniture, objects, buildings, etc., as well as bodies of knowledge.

[4] Consequently an orientation is always gendered. Taking up the notion of gender, I refer to Joan Scott's groundbreaking article, 'Gender. A Useful Category of Historical Analysis' (1986), in which Scott made clear that gender is not only a constitutive element of social relationships that are based on perceived differences between the sexes, but that it is also a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Gender thus has to be used as a category to analyze and eventually deconstruct these power structures and discourses that proclaim to be impartial.

[5] See also Alkemeyer 2008, pp. 56–57.

[6] This text is an outcome of long-standing, prolific research environments in which students, teachers, scholars, curators, artists and beyond engage in conversations about the role and impact of a hidden curriculum in various politico-aesthetic-educational formations. Next to all participants, my special thanks go to Thomas Alkemeyer, Janine Armin, Christoph Baumgartner, Binna Choi, Gianmaria Colpani, Simone van Hulst, Claudia Hummel, Emily Pethick, Louise Shelley, Katrine Smiet, Ruth Sonderegger, Katrin Thiele, Marina Vishmidt, the Gender Program at Utrecht University and PhD-in-Practice at Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. For more details see [www.hiddencurriculum.info](http://www.hiddencurriculum.info).

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