SPACES OF UNEXPECTED LEARNING 2

Annette Krauss, Emily Pethick & Marina Vishmidt

EMILY PETHICK   I would like to briefly mention Annette's project, *Hidden Curriculum*, in order to set a context for this discussion. This is particularly significant as the current conversation leads out of an earlier one that took place on the project.[1] *Hidden Curriculum* sought to investigate the kinds of learning that take place in schools, but which are not part of the official curriculum, by looking at unrecognised and unintended forms of knowledge accompanying the official learning processes in schools. The project was realised at Casco in Utrecht, in 2007, through a series of workshops with two groups of 14 to 17 year old students from two schools in the city. The workshops took place both in the space at Casco and in the schools. In these workshops, students reflected upon their own actions and behaviours in school, in particular cheating tricks that they had developed in order to negotiate rule structures. The project involved forms of collective process for self-reflection and critical thinking in order to deconstruct different modes of behaviour and institutional structures. The students translated their investigations of these issues into various actions and interventions that happened in the school and in the city. These activities, in turn, attempted to reveal the invisible codes of conduct and rule systems in the public realm as another form of 'hidden curriculum'.

In a broader sense, *Hidden Curriculum* looked at how institutional structures are negotiated in all areas of public life. Taking the school as one example, this entailed thinking about how people deal with rules and with imposed categories of thought, and how they both internalise, as well as subconsciously resist, these. The project looked for the grey areas where these kinds of actions are taking place – often even subconsciously – as forms of micro-resistance to institutional frameworks, and it looked at how these could be acknowledged as such. In this respect, the project also disclosed the different kinds of institutional formats that are being resisted, which, in this case, resulted in a direct comparison between the two schools – a more traditional school and a newer school that had been adapted to feed the 'knowledge economy' and had introduced 'flexible' working.

It now transpires that our ongoing conversation will take place in the context of a book which aims to look at what has been described as an 'educational turn' – a shift that the book's editors have recognised in artistic and curatorial practices – towards pedagogical models, as exemplified through diverse projects. What seems key to me here is the difference (as highlighted in Annette's project, *Hidden Curriculum*) between learning as a process that is encountered in all areas of life and the more top-down or institutionalised procedures

1.   'Spaces of Unexpected Learning: A conversation between Annette Krauss, Emily Pethick and Marina Vishmidt'. *Hidden Curriculum: A project by Annette Krauss.* Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht/episode. 2008.

of 'education'. I would consider that a number of the projects we realised at Casco involved forms of learning which I would not necessarily see as 'pedagogical', or 'educational'. So, perhaps it is useful to start with these terms in order to tease out some of the relations that are implicit in these kinds of practices and the relationships they have to institutional and social structures.

ANNETTE KRAUSS　　This introduction to our conversation brings to mind some of the questions that were triggered by a discussion in the framework of a lecture programme, held this year at the Rietveld Academy, which had been dedicated to thinking around education. In an initial discussion about the links between art and education, someone from the audience commented that 'schools (universities, academies) are designed in order to foster subjects capable of acting in society'. This immediately raised a number of questions for me, such as: Which society are we talking about here – a past, present or future one? What forms of knowledge are communicated through schools, academies, etc.? Could this enquiry be expanded from institutionalised education towards everyday learning processes? It further raised questions as to: What we do and do not know. What we don't want to know and why. What are we not allowed to know? We can then take this further, by considering Simon Sheikh's essay, 'Spaces of Thinking', in which he asks: 'Which system are we educating people for'?

I would extend his question by asking 'how could we learn not to be compliant, functioning agents of a dominant (hence contested) social and economic system?' Knowledge and education are liberating but also restricting, so how can we deal with this ambiguity and paradox when it comes to actual practice?

What I am proposing here is attending to the continuous presence, production and revelation of blind spots. I am not interested primarily in revealing these blind spots but more in how a blind spot might function in a society in which, for example, the dominant paradigm is one of visibility. If I try to grapple with this from another perspective, this is a matter of accepting that whatever we do, say (in this very moment), write or read, will mean more than, and be different from, what we intend. How can we relate to this, theoretically but also very practically, in actions and movements?

Hidden Curriculum attempted to interact directly with this kind of phenomenon. One example of this was the attempt to physically (re-)appropriate spaces within the school building that are not part of the daily school processes, e.g. the top shelf in the classroom; the spaces between cupboards in the corridor; the spaces under one's chair or behind stacks of chemistry equipment. These physical investigations were progressed through discussions about what

these gaps – unused spaces or places that are not attended to – could mean when it came to actions and everyday practices in school; what specific knowledge is demanded in school and what happens if we put the focus on a whole range of unintended or unrecognised forms of knowledge, unofficial abilities and talents that are also generated in educational processes? For example, students learn to compare themselves with others or tolerate unfairness; they learn to anticipate what teachers want to hear or how far they can go in order to access their own interests during their school lives. Authority, dependency, pressure to perform, role models, and standardised thinking are taught and learned, without this necessarily being made explicit or noticed. These other forms of knowledge aren't fixed, but they form a structural component of the school system. We tried to address the realm of communication within school, with its hidden niches and mute practices, and to develop forms of investigation in order to approach these spaces.

María do Mar Castro Varela describes an underlying interest of this project when she elaborates the question: 'who benefits most from educational institutions?' She identifies these beneficiaries as being the ones who have learnt (at home) how to learn, how to present what has been learned or who know or – to use Bourdieu's term – have the *habitus* that is necessary to assert oneself. The ones that are good learners also learn which forms of social inequity and which forms of violence are legitimate and why it is not a crime to take advantage of one's own privileged position to construct a 'good life'. Therefore, it is also important that someone else learns to look the other way. This is what works in schools.[2]

Again, it seems to be a commonplace that (educational) institutions reinforce deep-seated hierarchies in society. What is, of course, more difficult to describe, or even to inhabit, are those existing processes which induce the perpetuation of social orders with their power relations and injustices. *Hidden Curriculum* is an ongoing attempt to find points of entry, together with the students, in an attempt to inhabit or at least address these processes.

When the students, for example, physically investigate their surroundings – an investigation which, on many levels, was a consistent preoccupation of the project – this directs attention towards the organisation of the classroom and the different body politics that are played out within educational environments. The body is always involved in learning processes; however, it is often neglected or simply forgotten in research or discussions around

2.　　Paraphrased from an interview with Mariá do Mar Castro Varela entitled 'Autonomous Knowledge Production in Postcolonial Perspective' ['Autonome Wissensproduktion in Postkolonialer Perspektive: Interview mit María do Mar Castro Varela] 2008. [www.frauensolidaritaet.org/zeitschrift/fs_103mar_castro.pdf].

education and learning. The flexible, open working structure, which can be observed in most educational settings nowadays, places an emphasis on activating and mobilising the learner and opposes the traditional model of sitting quietly in order to learn.[3] But, still, the learner's body is organised and socially regulated, as it always has been, but what is different now is the nature of the force and regulation at work. Examining the interaction between students and their learning environments, it becomes quite obvious that educational systems, academies, universities and schools are not independent of forces and ideologies in society. They respond to the forces, ideologies and structures of the larger society and adapt to them rather than oppose them. In this way, the flexible, open working structure described above addresses the requirements of the market and the demands for a flexible, mobile and efficient self-managing workforce. This, of course, relates back directly to the question posed earlier: 'Which system are we educating people for?'

MARINA VISHMIDT   I would like to return to the 'institutional' aspect of this subject in order to examine what kind of institutional space 'pedagogy' or 'education' is assuming, both within the premises of this volume and Annette's Hidden Curriculum project. I am interested in whether there might be an analogy – which is as suggestive as it is potentially misleading – between 'hidden' or 'folk' knowledge, used by agents such as students in the institutional setting of a school (in order to expand their own room to manoeuvre), and the role that 'education' or 'research' or this idea of an 'educational turn' might be playing with respect to artistic practices (which are seeking some kind of sphere of operation not strictly bound to the marketplace, or as a way of engaging with people outside the remit of 'audience' or 'public'). What is the traffic between the official and unofficial forms of knowledge in each of these cases? Furthermore, what is the nature of the fine line or hairline fracture that exists – and I think, in Hidden Curriculum's case, is enacted – between a type of de facto knowledge that undermines the status quo and a type that also makes it more tolerable? That is to say, how do certain types of knowledge make the transition from, or oscillate between, an improvised set of practices, or a commons, to something sanctioned as a 'turn', which can then be institutionally affirmed, developed, and analysed?

Further, with reference to Annette's question as to 'what are we being educated for?' – it seems that this question might help us to situate the educational turn in a self-reflexive rather than self-

referential field, so the enquiry would have to address the system of power relations such a turn could be naming, diagnosing or reproducing. Why has something like an educational turn in curatorial discourse or practice become necessary, or, symptomatic?

For instance, Annette's work in schools brought her into very direct contact with the imperatives of the 'knowledge economy' that the education system is geared towards. It seems hard to dispute that there might be more of a structural than a metaphorical correlation between the educational turn and the knowledge economy. This is especially so given changes in institutional remits and cultural funding related to neoliberal economic policies and the industrialisation of 'creativity'. Perhaps these developments are rather more salient to the educational turn than the legacy of radical self-education, or radical pedagogy, even though the latter is more frequently invoked in descriptions of those art phenomena that get subsumed under this turn as it is usually narrated.

AK   When we try to (re-)think education and pedagogy as (im)possible spaces for social change, I also wonder about the extent to which the contests and conflicts surfacing around social control play a role here. Given that systems of commodities are, on the whole, controlled by private enterprises and given that the public control of mass media has, in many cases, been supplemented by, or replaced by, privately owned media, isn't it more than likely that the educational systems – of which large parts (at least in Europe) remain under public control – have become the sites of conflict in a contest for control? This recent growth in interest in pedagogy and education seems to resonate in the field of art as well, where it is often connected to discussions of agency. Also, we must not forget that questions around educational 'potentialities' within art can affirm the social relevance of art itself.

In Germany, there has been a renewed focus on education in recent years in many fields, and politicians appear to have adopted much of the rhetoric of the 'British model', in which buzzwords – such as 'social inclusion', 'regeneration', 'access' and 'diversity' – have resulted in major changes in funding systems in the field of the arts.[4] This model is about to be more or less copied – 'cut and pasted' – in Germany and it has become influential in the Netherlands as well.

3.   See Thomas Alkemeyer on the physicality of education in *Hidden Curriculum: A project by Annette Krauss*. op. cit. See also, Thomas Alkemeyer, 'Lernen und seine Koerper'. B. Frieberthaeuser, M. Riegger and L. Wigger (eds.), *Reflexive Erziehungswissenschaften*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. 2006. pp. 119-148.

4.   Carmen Moersch carried out extensive research in this area. See Carmen Mörsch, 'Socially Engaged Economies'. Elke aus dem Moore (ed.), *Tillandsien*, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart/Revolver Verlag. 2004. pp. 179-185. On the backdrop of the British funding model, Mörsch elaborates on the relationship between art and state funding, and cultural production in the context of education and economy.

On the other hand, I am curious about what this turn might bring to those who have been working and researching in the field of education (and art) for some time, apart from the danger of being subsumed by a self-referential maelstrom. Is it possible to avoid being bracketed within these themes and move more towards developing specific ideas, cases, alliances and practices? What could be learnt from pedagogical practices that are consciously considered and developed as political practice?

During a recent research trip in the US with the curator Claudia Hummel, I visited the Freedom School in Chicago. It is a school that is based on the ideas of the Freedom School campaign originating in the 1960s Southern Civil Rights Movement, with the goal of empowering African Americans to receive the recognition of full citizenship and working towards social change. It was interesting to see how this school took on that legacy nowadays and whether it is still possible to re-create the productive atmosphere of the former collective endeavour, in which aspects of the social, political and personal context were synergising. They are very aware that what was once, back in the 1960s, radical and progressive pedagogy might now be questionable, in the context of late capitalism, or – to put it in the words of Nora Sternfeld – 'when the act of realizing a certain practice is haunted by the impossible'.[5] I understand this not merely as a dismantling or resolution of the contradictions that are inscribed in the pedagogical, but rather as a way to bear them and to act on the basis of them.

EP Speaking from the position of directing a small-scale institution, which is presently preoccupied with trying to resist the forms of standardisation, institutionalisation, and instrumentalisation that are imposed by public funding agendas, working with contradictions is somewhat familiar. This is all the more difficult here in the UK than it was in the Netherlands due to the current British cultural policies touched upon earlier by Annette. While I have for some time been working with practices that involve forms of collaboration, participation and learning, these terms have become so heavily incorporated into political agendas one feels like it's time to find a new vocabulary and a different, more critical, way of thinking about these practices that can separate them out again. Thus, jumping back to Marina's question – 'of what can a pedagogical turn be symptomatic' – it seems that pedagogical practices that have political motivations are often situated within these highly conflictual terrains and often attempt to deal with this by building a critical practice from within. Some of the projects that are cited by the editors of this book as forming the so-called educational

turn (such as the 'Copenhagen Free University', *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.*, 'Paraeducation', *Manifesta 6*, *Documenta XII*, etc.) present a wide variety of models of learning/education/pedagogy, most of which are more focused on finding a new model of academy and, in some cases, actively rejecting the bureaucratisation and standardisation of the knowledge-economy – such as the Bologna Declaration. For example, the Copenhagen Free University describes itself as follows:

The Free University is an artist-run institution dedicated to the production of critical consciousness and poetic language. We do not accept the so-called new knowledge economy as the framing understanding of knowledge. We work with forms of knowledge that are fleeting, fluid, schizophrenic, uncompromising, subjective, uneconomic, acapitalist, produced in the kitchen, produced when asleep or arisen on a social excursion – collectively.[6]

While here there is a displacement of the site of learning, in other cases there seems to be a drive towards opening the institution up to participation and collective learning, in order to create a site of potentiality. Irit Rogoff describes *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.* at Van Abbemuseum as exploring 'whether an idea of an "academy" (as a moment of learning within a safe space of an academic institution) was a metaphor for a moment of speculation, expansion, and reflexivity without the constant demands for proven results'.[7] Rogoff further enquires, 'if this was a space for experimentation and exploration, then how might we extract these vital principles and apply them to the rest of our lives? How might we also perhaps apply them to our institutions?'

These kinds of projects often propose other models for the spaces of art museums, galleries or biennials, but rarely manage to break out of, or disturb, the very un-malleable institutional frameworks within which they are often situated. While these projects often involve a temporary change of relations within the institution, after the project is concluded, the institution usually slips back into place as it was before, without leading to any sustainable, long-term initiatives that might actually effect change. I am interested in the potential of institutions to learn, or change, through what occurs within them. This is something that I attempted to start at Casco, where we would try to take the knowledge acquired in one project and feed it into others as well as into the way we worked as an organisation. Thus, one has to raise the question again as to who it is that is being educated, or is in need of education. Surely, it is also

5. Nora Sternfeld, *Das pädagogische Unverhältnis*. Turia and Kant. 2008. pp. 128.

6. See [http://www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk].
7. Irit Rogoff, 'Turning'. *e-Flux Journal*. No. 0. 2005. [http://www.e-flux.com/journal/issue/0].

the institution itself. In *Hidden Curriculum*, it was clearly noticeable that while the students were learning, through a period of critical self-reflection, it was also the institution of the school that was learning through their interventions into the school system, and the mixed reactions of the teachers to it, some of whom found it hard to accept the project's attitude of permissiveness.

This also relates to a question of institutional certainty, which Sarah Pierce raised in her recent text, 'They Spoke About Hippies', in which she writes: 'certain institutional work requires us to project a level of *certitude*, despite our doubts about how to proceed […] The longer I remain stuck in my archipelago, the more I want to disown this type of certitude in favour of multifaceted, complex ways of knowing'.[8] Taking this further, one could suggest that if institutions projected less authority, perhaps they would be more open to learning, to change and the kinds of things that arise through uncertainty.

MV   Following up on what has been said about the partial success of projects that attempt to enact certain forms of pedagogical questioning within art institutions, as well as earlier thoughts about the purposes of this kind of education or the motivations for the educational turn, I wanted to consider the idea of 'critique' a little further. Critique is a priority for 'educationist' (in distinction from 'educational' as a description of a normal part of art institutional programming) initiatives, like the ones Emily describes above. These initiatives attempt to 'smuggle' into the museum a certain battery of activist practices, which are sceptical of the normalising and spectacular aspects of the museum's social role but which also draw on the resources and credibility of that kind of site. I would agree with Emily's observations on how many of these projects can be defeated by the solid patterns of institutional life and by their own ephemeral and experimental nature within that, butI would also see the problem here as the problem of institutional critique in general – critique of institutions, authorised by institutions, can only culminate in a harmonious dialectic between the goals of the institution and the goals of the critic, re-affirming the privilege of both actors; the institution sets the stage and the critic delivers the expected service while bolstering her own critical credentials. A mode of ultra-reflexivity is solicited from the agents of critique, but that reflexivity is structurally held at a distance from the material and ideological conditions for that reflexivity to appear in public. This generates a kind of textbook example of power producing the subject who can speak truth to power; and the fact that this is taking

8.   Sarah Pierce, 'We Spoke About Hippies'. *Nought to Sixty*. ICA. 2009. p. 246. See also [http://www.ica.org.uk/We%20spoke%20about%20hippies,%20by%20 Sarah%20Pierce+17747.twl].

place in an art context lends it an element of indeterminacy or playfulness that makes everyone look even better.

On the other hand, institutional critique in general, and institutional critique that takes place with reference to the mechanisms of education, even autonomous education, rarely takes into account something I have recently heard discussed as the 'desire for institutions'. The survival of institutions over time is dependent not only on the management and control of those working within and associated with them, i.e. coercion, but there is also a positive moment, or moments, of those institutions fulfilling or producing desires. They do this by making various types of resources available to their members; by providing an interface and platform for projects to the outside world; by establishing a shelter in which to develop and nurture ideas and practices, even counter-institutional ones; by supporting the feeling of being part of something, of making a contribution, etc. It is only by taking such desires seriously (which the Copenhagen Free University did through the notion of 'self-institution'), rather than through increasingly formalist versions of critique, that we can ever hope to arrive at effective forms of self-organisation, especially in the current political and economic climate. This is also relevant for defending, or developing, emancipatory practices within institutions – practices which can respond to ever-tightening pressures from instrumental arts policies and quantification-obsessed corporate education management. In order for it not to be a purely defensive battle and rather than referring to a 'political' that is always happening elsewhere, the desires of the people who engage in these institutional structures must be integral to any politics that is rooted in these structures. An idea such as 'academic freedom', for example, which might have seemed a conservative notion thirty years ago, depending on the context, might nowadays create a space for the formulation of a new commons. When education has become one of the most highly commodified and instrumentalised sectors worldwide and debt slavery and 'employability' are the real products of most universities, academic freedom might become a basis upon which to decide what kind of 'freedom' might now be possible or desired.

The role of education in the current debates and developments around the 'global economic crisis' is also worth considering. As governments attempt to restore their bankrupt national treasuries with cuts, privatisation and rationalisation of social spending, university students are at the forefront of anti-crisis insurrections in various places in Europe. Education is again at the top of the agenda as the Bologna Process finds itself accelerated by the crisis. There is a policy debate in the UK right now about lifting the caps on student fees, which are already, at their current levels, triggering unsustainable levels of individual and social

indebtedness. So, education, with its relation to time and process, becomes a high stakes asset in economies which, over the past several decades, have become increasingly reliant on unrealisable claims upon future wealth generation. In my view, the role of education, or the educational turn in contemporary artistic practice, needs to reckon with this relationship – between how the emphasis on education 'keeps things open' in art and how financialisation[9] 'keeps things open' in the economy – and how, when things take a turn for the worse, the old forms of closure re-assert themselves and the urgency of education as a component of political praxis becomes clear, especially in terms of historical awareness.

AK   Well, I would add here that socially engineered education as a European project, in the form of the Bologna Process, actuates nightmares from a (modernist) planner's mentality. Against this backdrop, the tensions articulated in terms of the pedagogical resonate with a rather pessimistic undertone. Nevertheless, I believe in a certain process of 'fragilisation'. This is how I would refer to the institutionally based, yet independent, artistic processes that you have both described. At best, the institution, or the idea of the institution, becomes, to some degree, permeable and amenable to the various practices and desires described. From the perspective of the one who might enter different institutional settings, I think that re-arranging desires is at the heart of any educationist practice. I would insist on education as an alternative practice, instead of a reinforcing practice, as a crucial basis from which to start. For example, I increasingly doubt the notion of learning as an end in itself. This construct should be radically questioned by asking: 'Who develops what kind of motivations when engaging in learning, and when?'

Working within such contexts as the *Hidden Curriculum* project, I always feel that I become contaminated by the forces that could take an interest in the project, or by structural dispositions, whatever direction I take. Of course, what helps here is that form of critique that doesn't exempt oneself: the agent of critique. But, I remain unsatisfied when trying to grapple with my own practice. Recently,

I stumbled across the term 'Wit(h)nessing', from Bracha Ettinger.[10] With reference to my own practice, I would like to translate this term, to think of a form of solidarity which manages to amalgamate both aspects of the inside-outside position that I am trying to unfold, together with the students in the schools, in the collective research approach. 'Wit(h)nessing' addresses the question of personal responsibility, of direct witnessing, which is painful. It underlines how it is impossible to ignore one's own participation in that gaze, at the same time as taking part in a shareable, resonating process. It describes a kind of temporal mutual affinity that takes on the question of agency and engages the social imagination towards the impossible.

9.   'Financialisation' is a complex construct, often articulated alongside the terms 'globalisation' and 'neoliberalism' as the overarching triumvirate of concepts shaping contemporary capitalism. In the simplest terms, it is used to define the vastly expanded role for financial markets, actors, institutions and instruments in the operation of domestic and international economies. One conservative economist, the Harvard professor Benjamin M. Friedman, has indicated a feature of the pre-eminence of 'financialisation' by observing that 'in many […] firms the activity has become further and further divorced from actual economic activity.' See Benjamin M. Friedman, *The moral consequences of economic growth*. Alfred A. Knopf. 2005.

10.   See Bracha Ettinger, 'Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the matrixial gaze: from phantasm to trauma, from phallic structure to matrixial sphere'. *Parallax*. Vol. 7. No. 4. 2001.