

# Object Lesson

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*Chair Exploration Round 1, by Participants and Author, Bergamo Conference on Classroom Theory and Classroom Practice, Oct. 19, 2013. The participants and author explored non-standard uses of chairs as this poem was presented. Because of the seemingly static nature of built structures, the implicit curriculum they manifest from prior design decisions are often overlooked.*

## THIS CHAIR.

This chair is not an object alone, but a collection of memories, of expectations, of habits.

This chair is not merely an object, but a social construction, a discourse, an actor; this chair acts (Latour, 2005, p. 66).

This chair has implications and imperatives, limits and possibilities (yes, a curriculum.

The object-ivity of this chair generally serves to conceal its mandates.

This chair remains this chair.



*Chair Exploration Round 2. Learning always exists as action with pre-constructed curricular objects and within pre-constructed curricular environs. However, the participant and environment are never completely pre-defined prior to the learning event (Ellsworth, 2005).*

(Second round)

This chair is not an object, not an object alone but a collection (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

This chair, our sitting in it, our acceptance of it, this is “...how we take root, day after day” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 4).

This chair is not an object, but a construction (Latour, 1993, p. 30).

We can imagine the throne existing sheerly by the act of someone of status sitting in the chair. A chair becomes her chair. The chair is identified. The iteration is singled out by an already existing scratch, or, the location of the chair is noted. The chair might be made larger, taller, carved, bejeweled. The chair is moved to the end of the table, the point of an arc, the one chair that faces all the others. The chair is raised onto a platform, given a permanent location, given its own room. Edicts are set forth: no one else shall sit in *The chair*.

The chair confers power: to sit in the chair is to have the power. This chair.

The chair has imperatives (Baudrillard, 1996).

The witness stand, the judge, the jury, the onlookers - these each have their own chairs. These chairs have within their arsenal the lack of a chair - the jail bench, or, worse even than no chair, the mother of all chairs. The subject is strapped to his seat, physically forced to submission, to his place; he sits; he embodies the judgment; it runs through him. The chair.

Yes. There are imperatives.

This chair locates the body. The bell rings; it is time to switch your chair.

Community, building, room, seat. How did you end up in this chair?

The object-ness of the object conceals.

The physicality of this chair is not a real upon which attributes are laid (Butler, 1993, p. 29 on matter). The object is nothing except for its attributes.

Being real is an attribute.

And yet, this chair remains.

This is both troubling and comforting. Daily habitual use outperforms awareness so that this chair remains - as usual; moments of epiphany are scant in comparison to the half-minded use and re-enactment of habits that buffer belief in the real, a real that we can be a part of. Yes I am real. With this chair.

No.

This chair is not an object alone.



*Chair Exploration Round 3. Even through the minute adjustments of daily living (micro-learning), realities are continually (re)produced.*

(Third round)

This chair is slowly produced, mulled over, repeatedly re-membered. “Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 5).

Meaning is folded back into/as reality, and reality back into/as meaning.

So I remember with this kid there were colored chairs, and he would always sit in the colored chairs. He would like pick his nose and eat his boogers and I don't know. I don't know why we were so mean to him, I don't know. But he would always sit in the yellow chairs so none of us wanted to sit in the yellow chairs because HE Would sit in the yellow chair every day at lunch. So we were all like, "Don't sit in the yellow chair, that's his chair. It's probably got boogers on it." And that was that.

The possibilities and limits afforded by an object comprise a curriculum - a selection of possible actions, an action upon actions (Foucault, 1984).

Let us not assume, however, that natural use of the chair is enacted without a struggle. In fact, young children must be told the proper use of a chair. Squatting, slouching, standing are disallowed. Young children often fall out of chairs.

The teacher, after all, is the one who has a chair but does not have to sit in it.

The absence of an object also tells a story.

But this chair, this chair is real. So that I am real (Ellsworth, 2005).

And yet. “And so, when a poet rubs a piece of furniture - even vicariously - when he puts a little fragrant wax on his table with the woolen cloth that lends warmth to everything it touches, he creates a new object” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 67).

“The created object itself is highly intelligible; and it is the formation, not the form, that remains mysterious” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 106).

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