

Hidden Sources

Year: 1992
Level: First Year, Autumn Semester 1
Unit: 10161, 10162, Foundation Studies 1 & 2
Duration: 6 days
Dates: February 27, March 2, 5, 9, 12, 16.

Origin

At the commencement of 1992 I prepared a paper proposing a rationale for a new structure to the curriculum of Foundation Studies, outlining four key research directives to be examined sequentially across the four scheduled projects. The proposal for project 1, from which 'Hidden Sources' derived was as follows:

"The first studio exercise needs to address the predicament of anonymity evident in first gatherings and stimulate directly activities of idiomatic disclosure (ἄκ: idios: one's own). The exercise should operate as a catalyst that begins to prise open the 'personality' of each student. This could be best achieved in directing attention toward notions of culture. Given the diversity of cultures inherent in any student group – as a differential of inheritance that creates in every individual an exception; this condition of being moderated by a specific culture would register across a number of fronts.

- The question of 'identity' needs to be probed, the degree to which culture 'colours' identity, the degree to which notions of originality derive from notions of 'origin'. With what does a student identify?
- Each individual will tend to operate within a known boundary of familiarity. This familiar tracking offers insights as to the nature and influence of cultural antecedents – most immediately apparent within the context of 'family'.
- Emphasis needs to be placed on notions of 'dialect', 'diction' and 'intonation' in respect of occurrences. It is the 'locality' of action that is being observed as an expressive referent to a familial and thus cultural point of view – Bias needs enhancing in the first instance as a basis of inquiry (a respect for difference).
- Disclosures of opinion and interest at this stage offer vital clues of identity and assumptions within which each individual circumstantially sites themselves as a locational base.
- It is necessary within the area of research, that inquiry be diverted away from developments affiliated with the High School Certificate, which tends to level cultural differences and impose a certain regularity of outcome in relation to 'Art', that is usually too homogenously tailored.

The development of this research allows one to assess the nature and level of respect that each individual apportions to their own history – the degree to which they draw from this resource and evaluate its currency – what it allows each to purchase from, as it were, a concurrent 'cultural' budget. Pursuing this monetary analogy – each culture invests an individual who in turn re-invests (capitalises) on their own culture – in this instance through the 'economy' of art, and it is the way in which each student 'shops for ideas' in this sense that is being observed and assessed."

Premise

'Hidden Sources' took its lead from Jung's assertion that big picture history derives ultimately from the myriad of contributions at the level of the individual, often overlooked (as hidden from view) and largely unacknowledged in the broad brushstrokes of recounted history.

The project focussed on these individual well-springs as important 'sources' to draw from in formulating an art practice. Participants were required initially to select six 'belongings' of key significance to them that collectively alluded to their sense of identity (things that they strongly identified with). They were then asked to write a short description of each containing enough information that if it were lost, could be used to accurately describe the item in question and assist with its recovery. Each description was written on a separate card and the set was seen as an 'inventory'. The strategy then was to deliberately lose (misplace) these 'belongings' using the analogy of a lost 'suitcase' containing the items in question. Inventories were swapped anonymously each participant picking up the wrong 'suitcase' (ie. another persons inventory of belongings).

Each participant having acquired somebody else's 'property' (as described in the inventory that comes into their possession) is directed, from the six descriptions to visualise (depict) as six images, on separate sheets of paper, the items they have inherited, with as much fidelity to the descriptions as they could muster.

At the following session all the written inventories were 'confiscated' and the 600 or so separate images collectively produced in the interim pinned up anonymously around the walls of the studio (which became for the purposes of the project a 'lost property office').

Participant were then required to circulate through all these 'lost property' images looking for their 'belongings' (as envisaged by a third party). Having confidently identified their 'lost property' they would reclaim it (remove said images/'items' from the walls). Invariably ambiguities and uncertainties arose in relation to 'ownership', many items remained unclaimed as 'unrecognisable' and disputes arose when several claimed ownership of the same item. This all provided interesting points of discussion around the processes of visual description, of imaging, of imagining and depiction. Inaccuracies in the 'copy', and misinterpretations were (understandably) prevalent, disappointments were commonplace (perceived 'travesties' by the owners of their original valued 'belonging').

Once everybody had reclaimed their six 'adulterated' or 'tampered with' belongings (as the six images by another hand), the next stage was a 'letter of complaint' as a critique of the inherited images: the degree to which they appeared (almost fraudulently) as 'mistaken spurious identities': pointing out the inaccuracies, the 'faults' (as a 'faulty' image) and supplying additional written information to be sent back to the 'manufacturer' to 'repair' the images (bringing them into closer correspondence with the original items in question).

The anonymous 'manufacturer' was then required in receiving the 'letter of complaint' to 'repair' the images in producing a second set in keeping with the updated instructions received from the 'owner'.

Concurrent with this all participants were issued with a set of six small masonite 'cards' (100mm x 65mm), and were directed to produce six 'iconic' images that referred directly to their sense of self-identity. Discussions took place in relation to what an 'icon' was, its symbolic or emblematic propensity, the way in which it makes reference beyond itself through analogous means etc. [This segment of the project was largely directed by Rhett Brewer].

The project offered many points of comparative discussion between the various versions of both text and images as displayed in their respective sets, alongside the icons. A taxonomy of 'belongings' was elaborated elucidating ways in which identity 'tags' could further evolve and develop along a range of different research pathways.

Research Directive 1: Exception - Re-Specting - Intonation

HIDDEN SOURCES

"The great events of world history are, at bottom, profoundly unimportant. In the last analysis, the essential thing is the life of the individual. This alone makes history, here alone do the great transformations take place, and the whole future, the whole history of the world, ultimately spring as a gigantic summation from these hidden sources in individuals. In our most private and subjective lives we are not only the passive witnesses of our age, and its sufferers, but also its makers. We make our own epoch." C.G.Jung (Vol 10, p.149, Collected Works)

A Suitable Case

What are the formative constituents that make up our sense of self? Individual 'identity' is derived from a complex intermix of hidden sources, the ingredient elements of which can often be seen 'refracted' through the prism of our own culture as 'cultural identity'. Now, specifically, what do we mean by this term and if we were asked to identify ourselves culturally in what would our identification comprise? Foundation Studies commences as an elaboration of this *individualised* sense of culture, through an inquiry (Gk: *historia*) that will attempt, in part, to audit this sense of acquisitiveness and question what it is exactly that has been and is being acquired and what that can tell us about ourselves.

A Suitcase

Nominate six 'belongings' (properties) with which you closely identify. The items chosen should have the capacity to operate as identity-indicators; each should resonate in some significant way with a 'sound' that is of your own personal history (that sounds right). These six items are to be packed within an imaginary 'suitcase' that you will carry around with you for the duration of this initial inquiry. You should ensure that a sufficient diversity of 'belongings' be included, so that in the event of somebody else acquiring your 'suitcase' by mistake its contents should carry sufficient clues as to be able to trace back to its original owner.

In Case

You should draw up an inventory on separate sheets of paper of all the items in the 'suitcase' and give a detailed description of each. These descriptions should function as an 'insurance' cover for the purposes of retrieval should the belongings be 'misplaced'. You should be trying to avoid the possibility of mistaken identity, therefore the more precise the description the greater the chance of correct identification and recovery of the lost property in question.

The completed 'inventory of contents' needs to be brought to the first session, so it can be utilised indirectly as your research 'trigger'.