Amaze

Year: **2004**
Level: First Year, Autumn Semester 1
Unit: 100396 Creative Strategies 1
Duration: 2 days
Dates: March 16, 23

Origin

The structure of Creative Strategies in 2004 worked well for a number of reasons: the team of Harry Barnett, Daniel Wright, Emma Price (from 'The Kingpins') and myself proved a very effective blend of experience and enthusiasm. We made the decision to divide the first year group into a Fine Arts cohort and an Electronic Arts cohort allocating Daniel & Emma to Electronic Arts, each cohort was then further divided in two (which meant that Harry and I worked exclusively with the Fine Arts students). It was in this year that we introduced 'steps' in each of the two major projects offered (three steps in each), following on from an introductory 'primer' project. I conceived and prepared the first step, Harry the second and Daniel & Emma the final step in both cases. The second and third steps had to respond in some way to the original premise as introduced in 'Step 1'. In dividing up each project into three steps (or stages) students were required to make a presentation at the conclusion of each and this generated a much higher degree of productivity and general engagement because of the shorter turn around time. We also incorporated a 'Project Folio' which was an electronic template that all students were required to engage with in accounting for their understanding of each step, along with visual documentation of the work in process and final staging. This document was progressively compiled and offered invaluable insights into individual approaches and responses to the projects and constituted 20% of the overall mark. Harry Barnett was instrumental in initiating and designing the Project Folio.

Premise

In introducing the 'first step' of Project 1 I once again made reference to camouflage and crypsis: the notion that something can exist but remain virtually impossible to see, ascertain or recognise. The essential challenge was to create something that met seven key criteria: it had to be *unrecognisable,* have *no identity,* be *unlikely and unlikeable,* be *singular,* have *physical volume,* and be both *shapeless* and *meaningless.*

In the briefing I suggested an optimum response to the works produced would be of the kind: 'What's that?' or 'What's that supposed to be?' or 'What's that supposed to mean?', in other words perplexed responses. I raised a further set of questions to engage with these included: What constitutes a 'thing'? Is there a difference between something and anything? At what point does some 'thing' become 'art'? What does 'meaningless' mean? What makes something 'unlikely'? And is it possible to make a shapeless shape?

This was an enormously difficult challenge (in fact was impossible). In five of the key terms a high degree of subjectivity was licensed in relation to each individual's interpretation ie: *"for you".*

I was interested in creating an antithetical situation that directed focus into the terrain of the antidote as a counterweight to the way in which 'art' would be normally understood (in part, to challenge the stereotype). It incited the form*less* and activities without apparent meaning or significance, activities that would be seen as alienating to contemplate and engage with (that went nowhere and appeared absurd).

I made reference to a familial cluster of words that I considered for the purposes of the project to be 'genealogically' related: Maze, Amaze, Daze, Craze, Puzzle and a cluster of cognitively related states: of bewilderment, perplexity and confusion.

Although issues of abjection were not being overtly addressed through this project, the physiology of the gastro-intestinal tract became progressively more important as a way of understanding the 'processing' of the three steps. As a deliberate perversion we opted to work the project in reverse, commencing with the conjuring of formless faecal extrusions and retracing the journey back through and up into the mouth as the *formative* site anterior to consumption.

'Success' was measured exclusively against the set criteria, students collectively made this determination as to the 'most successful' in each group (eg. most meaningless, most shapeless, most unlikeable etc.) initially via a straw poll and following extended debate.

A MAZE

TO GIVE A WRONG IMPRESSION: BEGINNING WITH RAWNESS

A set of seven instructions:

1   Create something that *for you* is unrecognisable.
2   That *for you* has no identity.
3   That *for you* is both unlikely and unlikeable.
4   It must be singular: one thing only.
5   It must have physical volume.
6   It must *for you* be shapeless.
7   *For you*, it must be meaningless.

Allocated work time – 7 hours

For immediate assistance refer to and apply the following useful words:

Amasian - Old English: *to confound*
Amaze: to fill with astonishment or wonder; to confound; to perplex. Amazement: a feeling of astonishment or surprise. Amazing: causing amazement, wonder or surprise.

Masen – Middle English: *to confuse*
Maze: a network of intricate paths; a labyrinth; confused condition, mental perplexity; to bewilder.

Opposal – Middle English: *a question, interrogation*.
Puzzle: to oppose; to set against, to place against: challenge

Dasen – Middle English: *to stupefy*
Daze: to confuse, stupefy, bewilder. A method of painting ships so as to give a wrong impression of their speed and direction.

Ecraser **–** French*: to break*.
Crazy

Confundere – Latin: *to pour together*.
Confound: to mix up, mixture

Per-plectere – Latin: *thoroughly woven*.
Perplex: to make intricate or difficult to be understood, puzzle, bewilder.