Behavioural challenges for interpreters

Waymerks
An art-quest revealed

The meaning of the landscape

Arts media
Triggering an emotional response

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

Interpret Scotland

A' Foillseachadh na h-Alba

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Meaning and Motivation:
linking psychology and interpretation

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Interpret Scotland is an inter-agency initiative that seeks to:

- **Improve the quality and quantity of interpretation in Scotland**
- **Promote the co-ordination of interpretation at local and strategic level**
- **Share resources, expertise and experience to avoid duplicating effort**

Meaning *noun.*
That which is or is intended to be expressed by a word, symbol, dream, action etc.

Motivation *noun.*
The (conscious or unconscious) stimulus, incentive, reason etc for action towards a goal

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The next edition of the journal will take a look at Working with Designers and Consultants. Please contact the editor with any letters, news items and articles. Copy deadline is 15 December 2003

Cover - The Dig at the Museum of London was a reconstructed archaeological excavation for families which ran from August to October 2001.

The importance of 'knowing your audience'

I recall some years ago reading a research report SNH commissioned to look at the attitudes of young people to the natural heritage. It did not make comfortable reading; concern for and interest in the natural heritage just didn't seem to be important to this age group. In contrast, last year there was an exhibition of work produced by some of these same young people on natural heritage themes. The imagination, creativity and enthusiasm emanating from their work showed me quite clearly that by understanding what did motivate them, in this case working with multi-media artists, SNH had managed to awaken an interest in the natural world[1]. It really does pay to 'know your audience'.

In this issue, in the first of a range of thought provoking articles, we are all challenged by Sam Ham and Betty Weiler to make our messages more 'meaningful'. In unravelling what the Scottish landscape means to people, David Masters is also inviting some lively debate. One thing all the articles convey to me is that interpretation is anything but a straightforward and formulaic approach to communication. The need to understand what motivates people and to have empathy with a site or object goes without saying, but it is the vital ability of a good interpreter to convey messages with flair and enthusiasm that makes interpretation effective.

The impressive list of organisations who now belong to the Interpret Scotland group is testament to the increasing importance placed on interpretation. The co-operative nature in which these organisations are working together to produce the journal and run training events is to be applauded.

Ian Jardine, Chief Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage

[1] The 'Young Peoples Art Project' involved 200 young people aged 12 –16 working with 35 artists to explore the marine and woodland environment. For more information about the touring exhibition and to obtain a free CD Rom of these projects contact Irene Watson, SNH on 01738 444177.

Interpret Scotland is published twice a year and is distributed free on request. **If you would like to join the mailing list, or if you are receiving duplicate copies** please contact Sandra Phipps at Scottish Natural Heritage on 01738 444177. You could also visit the interpret Scotland website: www.interpretscotland.org.uk

"This is our purpose: to make as meaningful as possible this life that has been bestowed upon us."
Oswald Spengler, philosopher, (1880-1936)

persuasive interpretation

Professor Betty Weiler & Professor Sam Ham

When psychologists talk about persuasion, they mean communication (whether verbal or non-verbal) that compels an audience to think, feel or behave in a certain way. Until the desired outcomes have been specified, the term 'persuasion' is vague. In communication psychology, these outcomes are typically classified as cognitive, affective and behavioural, and in interpretation, we often talk about knowing, feeling and doing objectives. 'Persuasion' means achieving one or more of these objectives. Most interpretation rightly focuses on knowing and feeling objectives, but sometimes achieving behavioural outcomes is also important.

Thematic interpretation as persuasion

A premise of thematic interpretation is that getting a theme across to an audience can 'persuade' by producing desired knowing, feeling and doing outcomes. And this is certainly true when the theme is strong and compelling to its intended audience. But lame or weak themes don't have that effect. They mainly just bore people. The old 'teacher-tell' model of interpretation advises interpreters to set 'knowing' objectives that specify what visitors will remember after experiencing the interpretation ("they will be able to state three reasons that…", or "the four ways that…", or "the five kinds of…."). This sort of thinking produces interpretation that is focused too narrowly on audiences' factual recall of its content. Although it may be straightforward to do and provides easy-to-measure 'results', nothing in interpretive philosophy has ever supported this approach. Interpretation is intended to move us, not 'teach' us, and most interpreters would agree that the two are qualitatively different.

Although any theme expresses a 'fact', it is the profundity of the fact that produces desired results. Alone, a visitor's recollection of a theme says little about whether the interpretive programme accomplished anything important. Weak themes based on recall objectives really don't achieve much, even if every visitor remembers every fact (which, of course, they virtually never do). Strong themes, on the other hand, can lead to worthwhile knowing, feeling and doing outcomes.

Tilden[1] summed up the purpose of interpretation in a single word, 'provocation'. A strong theme is one that provokes a person to think. When we are provoked by an idea, we think about it, wonder, ponder, and sometimes entertain new and wonderful possibilities about a place or thing or concept. This often results in implanting new beliefs about the thing being interpreted, or in existing beliefs being changed or replaced. The basic psychology of this process is well established in research on the theories of reason action and planned behaviour, elaboration likelihood model, and schema theory. If you'd like to learn more about these theories, and about the research that supports them, please look at the longer version of this article and references on the web site (www.interpretscotland.org.uk).

Thematic interpretation as 'meaning making'

A theme is not just some arbitrary statement of fact, but rather a singular statement that captures the meaning we hope will be internalized in a visitor's psyche in order to achieve some combination of knowing, feeling or doing objectives. Contrary to 'teacher-tell thinking', this view sees interpretation not as arbitrary theme-giving aimed at producing factual recall, but rather as purposeful meaning-making aimed at impacting another human being's point of view about a place, a feature, or an idea in a way that produces desired knowing, feeling or behavioural outcomes. For more on this point, see Ham (2003).[2]

In summary, to be 'persuasive', interpreters should concentrate on getting compelling themes across to their audiences, rather than on producing recall of facts. The established psychological research underpinning interpretation strongly supports this approach.

Professor Sam H. Ham, University of Idaho, USA, and Professor Betty Weiler, Monash University, Australia

Thematic interpretation: examples of weak and strong themes

Topic: Battle of Culloden

Weak theme: The Battle of Culloden occurred in three main stages.

Stronger theme: History records Culloden as a very personal battle, one that pitted brother against brother, and father against son, while mothers, daughters and sisters watched the carnage. It was a battle most Scots would never want to repeat.

Explanation: The second theme is stronger because it is personal, focusing on what visitors care about (family, loved ones, survival). Visitors can empathise with this and project themselves into the story. They can connect. Conversely, the first theme concerns itself with an inanimate concept ('stages of the battle') and says nothing about the human significance of what happened. The second theme also offers a moral to the story, whereas the first theme offers no conclusion or moral. Both could result in entertaining presentations that the audience would love. But when the visitors go home, it will be the second theme that provokes them to further thought. Why? Because the second theme matters to them, and the first one does not.

[1] Tilden, F. (1957) Interpreting Our Heritage Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press

[2] Ham, S. (2003) Rethinking goals, objectives and themes: a considered reaction to "Using interpretive themes and objectives will make your program planning easier and more effective" Interpscan 29(4): 9-12

"First learn the meaning of what you say, and then speak"
Epictetus, (55 AD-135 AD)

fickle messengers

In this article, James Carter explores some of the conscious and unconscious ways in which we relate to words and language, and what implications this might have for written interpretation.

© Tweed Interpretation Project

Words are an important part of most interpretation, but what is really going on in the mind of the reader?

Visuals get people's attention, but words make our meaning clear. Or do they? Do words have an unambiguous sense that will let us get our ideas across to the audience? I don't think language works like that.

In this extract from a poem, Edward Thomas uses a series of similes to describe his raw material:

You English words
I know you
You are light as dreams
Tough as oak

Thomas establishes the idea of words as 'light' to evoke their insubstantial nature: the written word is nothing, just some marks on paper. Using a comparison with 'dreams' instead of a well-worn cliché like 'feathers' makes you notice the idea more. But the word 'dreams' also carries a whole association of ideas with it apart from its literal meaning. Dreams are where we see visions of how we might like the world to be, or of how we fear it might be; where meanings and possibilities lurk beneath the surface of troubled waters, ready to nudge our flimsy raft into unknown adventures. These associations become part of Thomas' meaning in addition to the dictionary sense of the word.

This ability of words to suggest more than their literal meaning is also key to Thomas' next line. Describing words as 'tough as oak' is just right for the poem, since oak is so much an icon of Englishness.

Sound and rhythm

The sounds of words and the rhythms they create are also important, in prose as well as in poetry. As we saw with Thomas' poem, written words are nothing in themselves, simply marks on paper. Those marks are symbols to represent another symbol: the sound you would make if you read the piece out loud. I believe that when we read silently we hear the text subconsciously, and writing that makes an impact uses the music of speech to emphasise its point. To take an example almost at random, read this sentence out loud:

'The Lowlander has inherited the hills, and the tartan is a shroud.'

Feel how the repeated 'h' sounds draw out the first part of the sentence, and give it a softness that sets up the punch of the 't - t' in 'tartan' like a drum beat. The sentence closes with the falling, enveloping 'shroud'. The sound suggests being wrapped in something; the sense gives *The Highland Clearances* by John Prebble a suitably mournful ending.

Interpretation needs to make use of these qualities of language, the magic that makes it so flexible and rich. These ideas are especially relevant to writing text for panels and exhibitions, where every word must work hard for its place. Writing like this is not easy, although the end result may appear simple.

Fickle Messengers

The symbols we call words are immensely powerful, but they are fickle messengers. Their meaning shifts almost daily: before the late 1990s, the word 'text' was a noun, meaning words printed on a page or a passage from the Bible. Post mobile phone it is also a verb. This process is organic and unstoppable, despite the fury of columnists on papers like the Daily Mail. 'Google' is beginning to appear as a verb, as in 'I googled his name and came up with loads of websites'. Google's lawyers were apparently trying to restrict this use: perhaps they should read the story of King Canute and the tide!

This powerful symbol system works because we share a common currency of meanings and associations, but the real power of words is created inside our own heads, with all the quirks and associations we bring from our individual experience of the world. This in turn means that the 'meaning' of interpretation is essentially individual. We cannot predict exactly what people will learn or do in response to the words we put in front of them, because they will create their own meanings from their particular set of cultural reference points and experiences.

If this is the case, it raises some questions about the extent to which we can ever evaluate interpretation according to a set of specific cognitive objectives. Instead, perhaps we have to use words to present an individual view of something we find intriguing, or exciting, or moving, and hope that the power of language will inspire our audience to their own way of looking.

Words
They mean nothing
So you can't hurt me

I said words
They mean nothing
So you can't stop me.
(Doves: The Last Broadcast)

James Carter, Consultant and Chair of the Association for Heritage Interpretation, 0131 662 4278

"Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it."
Hannah Arendt, political theorist and philosopher, (1889-1951)

saying it without words

© The National Trust

We respond differently to different forms of communication. Text based media can instruct us, but arts media and activities can help us to feel by connecting with us in a more affective (emotional) way. Here we present an Interpret Britain Award winning interpretive project in the Peak District.

What are the three most important concepts in interpretation? No not Provoke, Relate, Reveal. Even more important than those are Communication, Communication and Communication. But communication is a two way process; it means listening as well as speaking.

The National Trust High Peak Estate in the Derbyshire Peak District is an area of outstanding ecological, archaeological, and geological significance. It is also a fabulous place for a day out.

When we first set about devising an interpretation strategy for the property, we wanted to integrate interpretation into a wider learning plan involving staff, volunteers and the public where two-way communication plays a crucial role in the day to day management of the property.

Arts activities are central to the provision of learning on the property. The combination of hands-on arts activities in a spectacular natural setting produces a double whammy of powerful personal involvement and emotional engagement which can lead to the sort of "life-changing experiences" that the new *National Trust Learning Vision* advocates.

When we had the opportunity to renovate an archaeologically significant vernacular farm building to be used as an interpretation shelter, we wanted to use arts media and involvement with a local school to shape both the process and the end result of the interpretation.

Grindle Barn in the Upper Derwent Valley lies on an old packhorse trail and is now part of a farm which retains traditional hay meadows - so many of which have disappeared in the last 50 years. The importance of the farm's history and wildlife make a visit doubly rewarding, but how could we go about communicating this hidden significance?

We started by commissioning artist Nicola Henshaw to carve a wooden bench which would symbolise some of the natural life of the area. The arms of the bench are in the shape of a curlew's head with its long downward bending bill. The bench fulfils the practical needs of the visitor while also suggesting deeper layers of interest. We also commissioned Nicola to carve a wooden panel which would go above the doorway, showing a timeline of life in the valley from the monks of Welbeck Abbey who first introduced sheep onto the hills, to the packhorse trains of the 18th century, and the present day walkers and wildlife of the moors and fields.

The next stage was to work with the local school and two artists to collect natural and historical images of the area and rework them in clay to create ceramic tile pieces to be inlaid into the barn walls. Children from Bamford School visited the barn and by means of a role-play we recreated the life of the packhorse trains, investigating how and why the landscape has changed over the centuries. Artists Lesley Fallais and Les Biggs worked with the children collecting words and images that reflected their understanding and response to this place.

Back in school these images were added to and refined, with each child creating their own tile. The art work became part of the interpretive process allowing the individual to communicate their own response to and develop their own understanding of the place. They therefore created their own significance rather than have someone else's significance forced on them.

The only words on the barn walls are the words of one girl's poem intended to evoke an emotional response. For the rest visitors can see dotted around the walls small images on the ceramic tiles that refer to the life, past and present, of this place. If they are sufficiently intrigued to find out more there is a leaflet, illustrated by the children, available in a dispenser in the barn. This provides more information in the form of an imaginative journey of a packhorse train through a changing landscape, identification of some of the hay meadow flowers, information about the environmental significance of this site, and useful visitor information.

Grindle Barn demonstrates an arts based approach to interpretation and learning across the property that gives people the opportunity to discover, create and communicate their own sense of the significance of a place through imaginative and emotional responses.

In making the Interpret Britain award, the judge noted that they were "particularly impressed by the integration of arts activities as a medium for interpretation...the interpretation appealed not just on an intellectual level but also on an emotional level, encouraging a response and direct involvement from the user."

Adrian Tissier, The National Trust
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"If it is true that words have meanings, why don't we throw away the words and keep just the meanings?"
Ludwig Wittgenstein, philosopher, (1889-1951)

"I'm told I'm no good, so I'm gonna prove it..."


© Doug Gleave

Camley Street Natural Park in London was born from a rubbish tip 15 years ago and uses every anti-vandal strategy available. This particular display was so successful the kids wore out the 'food webs' by playing with the car seat belt inter-connections so much!

Bringing about behavioural change can be one of the most difficult challenges for interpretation, especially where vandalism is concerned. How can interpreters tackle vandalism before it overwhelms us, destroying months of work and morale? I believe it can - but only by understanding its root causes and employing appropriate interpretive tools.

Vandalism is often about the vandal's personal psychology, and to counter this we need to relate to their experience of negative role models, rejection and low self-value. Often their personal creativity has been dismissed and their friendships have become mainly based on peer power and proving their street credibility.

These individuals are often unaware of the burden of their background ... all that matters is personal action and reaction. Their destructive behaviour can come from:

- A need to prove something – to themselves and others
- A need for peer acceptance
- Feeling resentful towards adults and 'their world' in an attempt to fill the emotional gap resulting from a lack of affection when very young
- An "I've been told I'm no good so I'll prove it" attitude

What about us?

Our relationship to the vandal says as much about us as it does about them. If we can relate to the world through their eyes we might better understand their problems and attitudes. Staff worn down by vandalising kids can hardly be expected to suddenly start 'empathising' with them - locking them up may be closer to some rangers' true desires! However, it's exactly this mutual antagonism that breeds the problem ... it's a circle that must - and can - be broken.

Front line staff may need help and support if they recognise any of the following feelings when their interpretation is destroyed by vandals: threatened personal status, prejudice, inability to understand, frustration, personal fear etc. The irony is that many young kids feel very similar things ...

Practical steps

Interpretation that is a potential target for vandalism needs to accommodate young people's needs. The best solution is to get local youngsters involved in designing their own 'messages' in their own way. Give them their own space to genuinely value what they do, encourage them to exhibit their ideas, and they will ensure that it is imaginative! Set-up events and provide them with publicity outlets which celebrate their contributions. If you feel that's over-the-top, count the cost of 'year on year' repairs to vandalised facilities and you may find the books balance in a surprising way.

The following practical steps suggest ways in which you can tackle vandalism through interpretation:

- Destructive behaviour can be diverted into positive energy by ensuring any interpretation provokes rather than instructs.
- Offer rewards for achievement when involving young people. Observe their reaction as you change the rewards from 'things' to 'concepts'. An example of this comes from an urban park in Warrington where the Ranger Helpers (local youngsters) collected 'Finch Awards' (small certificates) for positive activities in the Park. This then led some of the kids into gardening, supervision of other school groups, guided walks etc. I also watched them stop motorbikes passing through the park!!
- Keep track of the addresses of participants in anti-vandal programmes. Use reformed vandals to reach others. This is about getting inside the peer group process, which is only possible by using the kids themselves.
- Slowly introduce non-precious artefacts into a site/centre free of security. Do this during an anti-vandal programme over a 4-6 week period and measure the theft rates.
- Use cheap items that can be easily replaced to reduce the vandal's 'value-added'. For example, a simple photocopied notice pinned onto a post inside a plastic sleeve is just not a tempting target. 'Added value' is about vandals wanting their impact to be noticed, even to be caught! Nicking a plastic wallet costing 20p has no added value (or street cred)!
- Don't fight them, make your displays more open... not more closed. Take away the ropes and barriers to reduce the sense of authority and power. This is especially useful in green spaces, but also applies to displays and exhibitions. I don't advocate abandoning caution, I'm only suggesting reducing the 'power targets' - authority, precious values, barriers, symbols of middle class respectability etc.

This anti-vandal approach works and is based on quietly repairing the vandal's activities, time after time, without comment, without publicity, and without kudos accruing to the damage and thereby to the vandal.

Doug Gleave, exhibition designer, trainer and consultant, dg@multium.co.uk

A longer version of this article is available on the Interpret Scotland web site www.interpretscotland.org.uk, including a case study of the Camley Street Natural Park in Kings Cross, London.

"Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten"
B.F. Skinner, psychologist, (1904-1990)

playtime!

© Museum of London

Children loved playing in the sand pits, digging up real artefacts in a simulated archaeological 'treasure hunt'.

Where children are concerned, playing is central to their learning and development. What implication does this have for interpretation? Here we present an Interpret Britain Award winning project from the Museum of London.

The Dig at the Museum of London was a reconstructed archaeological excavation for families which ran from August to October 2001. The excavation was supported by a small interactive display that introduced visitors to archaeology and the work of archaeologists in London.

The Dig aimed to give children a taste of what it is like to be an archaeologist through play. The excavation consisted of 24 sand-filled trenches, each designed for a family of four. One set of 12 trenches was re-set while the other was excavated, so ensuring back-to-back 60-minute sessions each accommodating up to 50 people. Each trench contained a reconstructed Roman wall and mosaic floor, a reconstructed medieval wall, and 20 or so original Roman fragments of pottery and bone. Following a short safety briefing, families worked alongside two real archaeologists to excavate the trenches using authentic equipment and to identify, date and record their finds on a record sheet and site plan. Each trench was unique – when all the trench plans were put together in a de-briefing session at the end of the activity they formed a larger site plan, revealing both Roman and medieval buildings.

The team of 20 or so archaeologists recruited to work on the project, many from the Museum's archaeology service, were selected for their enthusiasm for communicating the excitement and value of their work, and were given training in both presentation skills and family learning. Their main job as 'Site Supervisors' was to support families' learning through questioning, helping to identify finds, and demonstrating excavation techniques.

Central to the concept of The Dig was the idea that adults and children should work together in their family groups – this was not an activity where parents or carers could stand on the sidelines and watch their children, they were actively involved. Early versions of the trenches were tested with families to ensure that they were the right size, that the excavation could be completed safely in the available time, that the activity would engage and inspire both children and adults, and that it would be fun.

An understanding of play was an important part of the development of The Dig. The activity mainly involved two types of play – exploratory play and dramatic play. Exploratory play involves exploration, investigation and problem solving, all essential elements in the excavation – digging in the sand, discovering objects and trying to work out what they were. Dramatic play can involve taking on the role of someone else, in this case archaeologists – children were given hard hats, trowels, shovels and brushes and were shown how to excavate, like archaeologists, in a careful and systematic way. They were encouraged to become archaeologists for an hour.

The dynamics of family learning was also an important consideration. Observing families during formative evaluation revealed that all families used the trenches in the same way – the children got in the trench and did the digging and finding of objects, while the adults remained outside the trench and took responsibility for removing the sand and working through the record sheet, which provided step-by-step instructions. Adults would often use the record sheet to direct the children's digging, while the children would ask questions about the finds. In this way both adults and children had a positive role in the activity, and the record sheet gave the adults the confidence to support their children's learning. Completing the activity as a team gave families a sense of shared achievement.

The Dig proved to be a great success – it attracted over 7,500 people and was overall winner of the 2002 Interpret Britain Awards. Our summative evaluation was very positive – digging was the most popular aspect of the activity; visitors valued the opportunity to handle original Roman objects and work with archaeologists; and 80% of families gave it an enjoyment rating of 8 or more out of ten.

The success of the project was the result of a number of factors – careful planning, thorough front-end and formative evaluation, using original objects, and involving archaeologists. But perhaps most important was the commitment to encouraging and facilitating family learning through play.

Frazer Swift, Deputy Head of Access & Learning, Museum of London, fswift@museumoflondon.org.uk

"Whoever controls the language and the symbols, controls the race."
Allen Ginsberg, poet, (1926 - 1997)

waymerks

research review

Is it any good?

Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned a research project to evaluate the effectiveness of the interpretation in six visitor centres.

Four of the centres were owned and operated by SNH and the other two had received a grant towards the cost of the interpretation. All the centres had prepared an interpretation plan to guide the focus and content of the exhibition. Strathspey Surveys developed a list of visitor questions specific for each of the centres, based on both the original plans and site visits to assess the final content of the exhibitions.

How did we do?

Starting with the good news ... for all the centres 'the vast majority of visitors found their visit 'very' or 'quite' enjoyable'. However, when it came to analysing visitors attitudes, behaviour, learning and their perceptions of the main messages, each centre faired differently.

The consultants were also able to draw out some specific recommendations:

- Have a clear interpretive framework with a logical hierarchy and unique or significant themes
- Visitors' needs and views need to be considered more throughout the process of developing the interpretation
- Pre- and post-test key interpretive exhibits
- Ensure there is a budget for evaluation that all funding partners are committed to

Perhaps inevitably the results of this research raised more questions than answers, but it has helped us to understand our visitors better, and it is now up to SNH and our partners to take note and act upon these findings.

SNH is committed to the delivery of good quality interpretation to engage with, entertain and enthuse visitors about the 'wonders of the natural world'. SNH now intends to set in place a more rigorous requirement, for ourselves and others, to carry out pre and post-project evaluation and to continually use the knowledge gained to improve our interpretive provision. See www.snh.org.uk or www.interpretscotland.org.uk for copies of the full reports.

Julie Forrest, Scottish Natural Heritage, 01738 444177

Creative Corner

Many of us respond to the landscape with passion. It takes an artist's vision and skills to communicate that feeling coherently. Sculptor, John Behm's response to his local landscape are his Waymerks on the Southern Upland Way.

The footpath passes John's studio. Its walkers know nothing of the struggles of the artist within, so John was inspired to champion the tradition of making. Calling on his knowledge of history and archaeology, he thought out a way to draw attention to the rich products of past makers: the artefacts that bear witness to their craftsmanship, ingenuity and sense of design. He sought to demonstrate that artists still make beautiful things, and to remind people of the rich wildlife, past and present.

Hand-minted in lead and copper, the Waymerks are 'art tokens'. There are thirteen reverse designs, for thirteen stages of the footpath, and a common obverse. The latter is a palimpsest of earthworks which suggest mankind's impact on the landscape.

A Bronze Age beaker, an Iron Age sickle with a phallic handle, and an Anglo-Saxon beast from a ring are represented on the Waymerks. A wild boar appears for the Melrose section of the walk. This has double resonance: not only a former resident, it was also the insignia of the XX Legion at nearby Trimontium.

The Waymerks are left in hoards in artist-made kists. These have been concealed, though never completely buried, at remote and lovely places along the Way. Walkers are invited to take to the hills and look for them. Bronze plaques (bearing a bastard Latin word ULTREIA ('on with your quest') on the waymarker either side of the kist site identify where to look.

Successful hunters take home a Waymerk. The response of walkers has been delight, sometimes rhapsody. "I adored the submerged basin with its lid bearing the Covenantor text, but nothing can match that cunning little stone drawer in the bank!" wrote one. People report that they do go home and look at the website (www.waymerks.org.uk) written on every kist to discover the background to the designs. Many who have found a kist by chance say they have returned to the Way to search for others. The lure of an art-treasure hunt has people out on the hills, appreciating not only the landscape but the creativity of the people who live on it now and who have done so in the past.

Fi Martynoga is an arts organiser and environmentalist who manages the Waymerks Project, fi@martynoga.freeserve.co.uk

Waymarker - 'on with your quest'

"In my childhood we were assured that the brain was 'like a telephone switchboard' Freud compared the brain to hydraulic and electro-magnetic systems. Leibniz compared it to a mill and some ancient Greeks thought it worked a bit like a catapult. We see it as a computer."
John R. Searle in 'Minds, Brains and Science', (p44)

letters

Dear Editor

Can criticise – won't criticise

Interpreters are very critical people. Can you ever look at a panel or an exhibition or join a guided walk with your critical faculties switched off? For us any visit is beset by the myriad questions –'how would I have done this? why does this work? what's good here? ' Followed up by a critical assessment and discussion with family, friends and colleagues. Everybody does it.

So why don't we dare to do it publicly? There is much good interpretation in Scotland and we are rightly proud of this and praise ourselves for the quality and innovation through Interpret Scotland and elsewhere. But are we in danger of being complacent? In the middle of the cosy back slapping and mutual support, shouldn't there be some honesty? A bit of truthful, if painful, constructive criticism might be beneficial sometimes.

We offer several good reasons why we don't do it:

- Interpretation as we think of it is a small profession. We need the support of like-minded colleagues, and therefore can't risk upsetting any of them.
- Much of what has been achieved has been through partnership, agency working with agency and consultancy. Who would risk blowing the fragile framework of these partnerships apart by publicly stating that so and so's project was a waste of time, space and money?
- What consultant would risk future contracts by speaking out? Loose cannons have their uses, but we all need to earn a living.
- If criticism is handled badly, where does it rebound? Towards those who dared to stick their head above the parapet.
- How can we really comment without seeing the interpretive plan, its goals and themes?

In October 2002 Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park staff at the new Gateway Centre in Balloch welcomed members of the Scottish Interpretation Network. They gave an open, honest account of the interpretation in the centre. As a lecturer in Interpretation Kev subsequently returned with a group of students, looking at evaluation and interpretive planning. Both visits confirmed criticisms that LLTNP staff had previously discovered through their much more comprehensive evaluation. These critical comments from SIN and the students cannot change the interpretation, so you could argue that it was a pointless exercise, yet we feel that by being honest and openly accepting comment, the National Park are aware that something is not right and prepared to admit that, and are sharing and learning this with us.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Gateway Centre in Balloch

Interpret Scotland itself could be regarded as part of the same problem. It is an excellent publication, well produced and flagging up some of the best practice and positive news in interpretation. But how about some humility – where are the articles saying 'we tried something new, it was a good idea but it didn't quite work'? 'We are still making the same mistake – what can we do to about it?' We learn more from our mistakes than anything else, but only if we get the feedback, only if we know it doesn't work and can assess why and consider how to improve. As a lecturer and professional working in interpretation we are always looking for examples of good and bad interpretation. So who will volunteer to put something up for honest discussion not just polite praise?

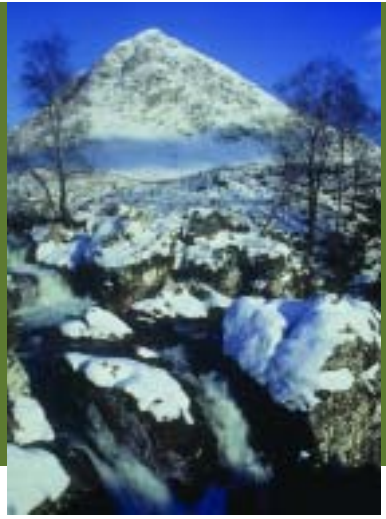
Let us end with Kev sharing a story about his recent holiday in Lewis: 'Amongst all the good interpretation I saw a small exhibition with dense text, undifferentiated layout and mounted on boards that swayed in the breeze so it was very difficult to focus on. Did I out of honesty and as a favour point this out to the staff? Sorry to say, I'm a coward as well and kept my head down below the parapet.'

Kev Theaker and Hugh Muschamp
Scottish Interpretation Network
www.scotinterpnet.org.uk

Editor's note
The last edition of Interpret Scotland did carry an honest and open article about the pros and cons of the use of IT media for interpretation at the National Park Gateway Centre. We also evaluated this journal through a readers' questionnaire and printed a summary of the results. That said, it is quite right that we learn more from our mistakes, and there is a case for the journal explicitly presenting examples of bad practice. Any volunteers?

"Tell me about your mother."
Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, (1856-1939)

what's up elsewhere



The Landscape Inside Us

We all have a conscious and unconscious relationship with the landscape. If you ponder for a moment what the Scottish landscape means to you, what might come to mind?

We can perceive the landscape as a wilderness, an idyll or a place of cruel expulsions. It is a source of food, but equally somewhere for fun, play and quiet contemplation. The countryside is a frequent setting for films, TV, drama and advertising, and as such is part of our everyday visual language. Mythologies of the land and landscape are an essential part of 'Scottishness'. Why is this connection so strong?

The way we use language begins to reveal the answer. We describe the 'brow' of a hill, a 'neck' of land, a finger, foot or mouth. Jura has 'Paps'. Parks are lungs. Rivers and roads are arteries. In the pre-Enlightenment era, areas of upland were known as warts, boils and excrescences. And much of the Gaelic language arises from the landscape itself – for example, the name of Strontian on the Ardnamurchan Peninsular comes from the Gaelic 'Sron an t-Sithein', which means 'nose of the fairies'.

The psychoanalytic perspective is that we can unconsciously relate to the countryside and landscape as an extension of our bodies. It is our primary attachment to and then loss of our mother's breast that is formative in our individual and collective psyches. Our experience of being utterly dependent on and then having to break free from our parents deeply affects our emotional lives. This primitive relationship is played out, consciously and unconsciously, in our relationship with the land and the landscape.

The countryside is perhaps most often perceived as being 'female' (Richards,1994).

The symbolism of mother nature and the bountiful, nurturing, life-giving land are common perceptions that still hold true. Rob Hinshelwood even describes the concept of the 'rape' of the 'female' countryside by the 'masculine' town/city[2]. But we can also perceive rugged and powerful mountain landscapes as a more masculine entity.

Through these unconscious connections, we project our internal relationships onto the landscape. Sometimes these relationships are light and creative, such as expressed in Sir Walter Scott's romantic poetry, and sometimes they are darker and 'destructive', as expressed in the sinister moors of Wuthering Heights. Both are valid and important aspects of ourselves.

But there is more to our emotional relationship with the landscape and countryside. Collectively, we socialise our relationships with the land in particular ways. In Scotland, the countryside has become a focus for exploitation and social conflict in which an elite had / have control over this fundamental resource. But it also came to represent a post-Enlightenment idyll. The landscape holds these contradictions, just like the conflicts in our inner worlds. Socially and psychologically, it is no coincidence that land reform was one of the first tasks of the Scottish parliament.

The landscape also contains many layers of human interaction and influence, laid down over centuries of settlement and land use. The visual clues of the past in the landscape can connect us with our pre-industrial selves.

These are all ways in which we relate to the landscape and countryside, and they can come into play when we and our audience visit the countryside. What might this mean for interpretation?

Firstly, it is enlightening to become aware of our internal relationship with the land, and to let this awareness filter into our work. As this happens, the more emotionally engaging our interpretation might become. Secondly, interpretation should support our relationship with the landscape and make the countryside more accessible. But, it should not seek to mediate this relationship, either through intrusive over-interpreting or being too prescriptive about 'authorised' messages about what the landscape means.

David Masters, Editor. Thanks to Dr Rachel Hirschfeld for her assistance with this brief review.

A fantasy guided tour

Try this simple exercise to explore your personal connection with the landscape:

Think of a photo, picture or imaginary piece of landscape.
Remember it and close your eyes.
Enter into the landscape in your imagination.
Where are you – on a hill, in a valley, beside a field or stream?
What can you see – are you looking up or down, or all around?
What can you hear – the wind, people, dogs, tractors, birds?
What can you feel – the sun or rain, earth, heather or turf?
What are you doing – are you sitting or standing, lying, walking or even flying?

Ponder for a moment on what this place means to you... When its time to go - how do you leave, and what does this make you feel?`

When you've finished, think about how you 'interpreted' this landscape. What might this say about your own personal connection with the land?

1B. Richards, 1994, The Body of the Nation, in Disciplines of Delight – The Psychoanalysis of Popular Culture

2 R. Hinshelwood, 1993, The Countryside, British Journal of Psychotherapy 10(2)

"You know how it is when you go to be the subject of a psychology experiment, and nobody else shows up, and you think maybe that's part of the experiment? I'm like that all the time."
Steve Wright, disc jockey, (1955-)

news & events

Interpretation **Advice**

The Scottish Museums Council is developing two strands of support for interpretation in Scottish museums: (i) a range of fact sheets and guidance notes on issues such as planning for interpretation, writing effective interpretive text, developing interactives, evaluation, and funding interpretive projects; and (ii) assessments of interpretive provision for individual museums, with a follow up report and recommendations for future improvements. Contact Emma Morehouse on 0131 476 8594, emmam@scottishmuseums.org.uk

Dundee Discovery Point Antarctic Centre wins Interpret Britain award

Congratulations to the Discovery Point Antarctic Centre in Dundee for its Interpret Britain Award. The Centre, which houses Captain Scott's famous polar exploration ship 'Discovery', is operated by the Dundee Heritage Trust. The Trust also runs Dundee's Verdant Works, the European Industrial Museum of the Year, which tells the story of Dundee's textile industry. Well worth a visit.

Publications

If you would like to explore some practical and philosophical aspects of the psychology of creativity, you might be interested in the following publications. All reviews taken from Amazon.com.

Five Star Mind: Games and Exercises to Stimulate Your Creativity and Imagination
Tom Wujec (1995)
Main Street Books ISBN: 0385414625, 256pp, £9.36
"A brilliant description of the creativity process. There are lots of other books which describes methods for collecting thoughts and ideas, but none I have read that describes the process as good as this one. Just think about what kind of preparation you should impose on your colleagues before they enter your next brainstorming session..."

Technique for Producing Ideas, James Webb Young (2003)
Contemporary Books, ISBN: 0071410945, 64pp
"An advertising classic since 1939 that reveals a simple, sensible idea-generation methodology that has stood the test of time. Now reissued for a new generation of creative professionals looking to jump-start their creative juices, this powerful guide details a five-step process for gathering information, stimulating imagination, and recombining old elements into dramatic new ideas."

Cracking Creativity: The Secrets of Creative Genius, Michael Michalko (2001)
Ten Speed Press, ISBN: 1580083110, 319pp, £16.99
"A path-breaking book that characterizes how creative geniuses think and shows how we can apply their thinking strategies to become more creative in our work and in personal lives. Each creative-thinking strategy includes specific, practical techniques with precise instructions on how to implement it."

Events

Wordsmithing - The creative use of words to communicate with visitors to botanic gardens. Botanic Gardens Education Network Conference.
Glasgow Botanic Garden
October 20-22, 2003
Contact Louise Bustard, Glasgow Botanic Garden, Tel 0141 334 2422

Interpretive Master Planning. Developing an interpretive plan for your park, heritage site or attraction.
Plas Tan y Bwlch, Snowdonia National Park
11-13 May, 2004
John Veverka and Plas Tan y Bwlch
Contact Plas Tan y Bwlch on 01766 590324, plas@eryri-npa.gov.uk

Planning, Design, Fabrication and Evaluation of outdoor interpretive panels.
15-17 September, 2004
Plas Tan Y Bwlch, Snowdonia National Park
Plas Tan y Bwlch and John Veverka
Contact Plas Tan y Bwlch on 01766 - 590324, plas@eryri-npa.gov.uk

exploring place with passion

The project Exploring Place was born from a heartfelt passion, which rapidly developed into an obsession, with a mountain in the heart of a city. The city is Edinburgh; the extinct volcano, as I discovered, had many names (both genders!) of which the most well known is 'Arthur's Seat'.

Arthur's Seat has a long history of human use, but I was interested in exploring how people feel, react and respond to this small segment of wildness, as well as my own interpretations as artist, geographer and environmentalist. Exploring Place was classified as a research project in creative interpretation for Scottish Natural Heritage and, having given birth to the idea, I was in the fortunate position of creating my own brief. This gave me the freedom to explore, probe, dissect, analyse and respond from many different angles in the most appropriate ways for this site, to experiment and to learn from mistakes as well as successes. A tightly structured remit can be stifling and restrictive for any creative worker, so a leap of faith can be required by all parties.

The project included workshops for the public targeted at local groups of all ages; one to one working with individuals developing creative responses to the site; weekly open studio sessions in a caravan/studio on site; and a small publication which brought together artworks inspired by the site (poetry, text, extracts from creative questionnaires, drawings, photographs and film stills). This was distributed throughout Edinburgh for people to pick up free.

Exploring Place has been exhibited three times. The first showing was in three different venues snaking down to Arthurs' Seat: New Street Exhibition Space (gallery, café and nightclub - the Bongo Club), Museum of Edinburgh display cases, and the Holyrood Park visitors centre. Films inspired by Arthur's Seat were projected at night in the street from dusk till dawn outside the Club - aimed at one of the most elusive audiences the urban youth market. This exhibition shoved Arthur's Seat in their faces as they danced the night away and staggered home at night.

Interpreting is so many things: finding out, expressing, uncovering, sharing, celebrating, giving different perspectives. That interdisciplinary creativity is an ideal tool to facilitate this is born out by two well respected thinkers:

Italo Calvino, in 'Invisible Cities', asserts that "the grand challenge for art is to be capable of weaving together the various branches of knowledge, the different 'codes' into a manifold, multifaceted vision of the world"

Jean Piaget, child psychologist, notes that "you learn through inventing, not through being taught what others know but through experiencing, inventing knowledge anew".

There was no formal evaluation of Exploring Place, but strong anecdotal evidence suggests it had a real impact. There has been a constant demand for the publication and praise for its unique multi-disciplinary approach. Copies distributed to the Edinburgh libraries 'went like hot cakes'. Historic Scotland rangers use the permanently sited work in the new Holyrood Park Education Centre to demonstrate and celebrate the different dimensions of the site.

Here is a typical view from the visitors' book: "I certainly think more about it (Arthur's Seat) than I did before. I guess I felt it was a good way to get a view of the city - but hadn't actually considered the land itself."

Exploring Place showed that landscape 'can be cool' and that Edinburgh has a fantastic resource open to us all, 24 hours a day. I haven't been able to count if more young people now stagger up the hill to see the sunrise after a hard night's clubbing, or whether visitors reflect for a moment that they are walking across an extinct volcano, but I hope they do. The project certainly created a local and international Arthur's Seat community and network that still buzzes with life.

As artist, co-ordinator and avid environmentalist this project gave me hope. Hope that this island of green can inspire stories, paintings, emotions and feelings that have the power to move people to tears. Hope that an organisation such as SNH is prepared to take a risk on an artist who has no intention of producing a monumental, landmark (landscar?) sculpture, and hope that artists and creative approaches advocated by them will become an essential part of any engaging interpretation project.

Exploring Place was also supported by Historic Scotland, Millennium Awards and Out of the Blue Trust. Please email me if you would like a copy of the Exploring Place artworks publication.

Anne-Marie Culhane is currently artist in residence at Exmoor National Park, email wook5@hotmail.com