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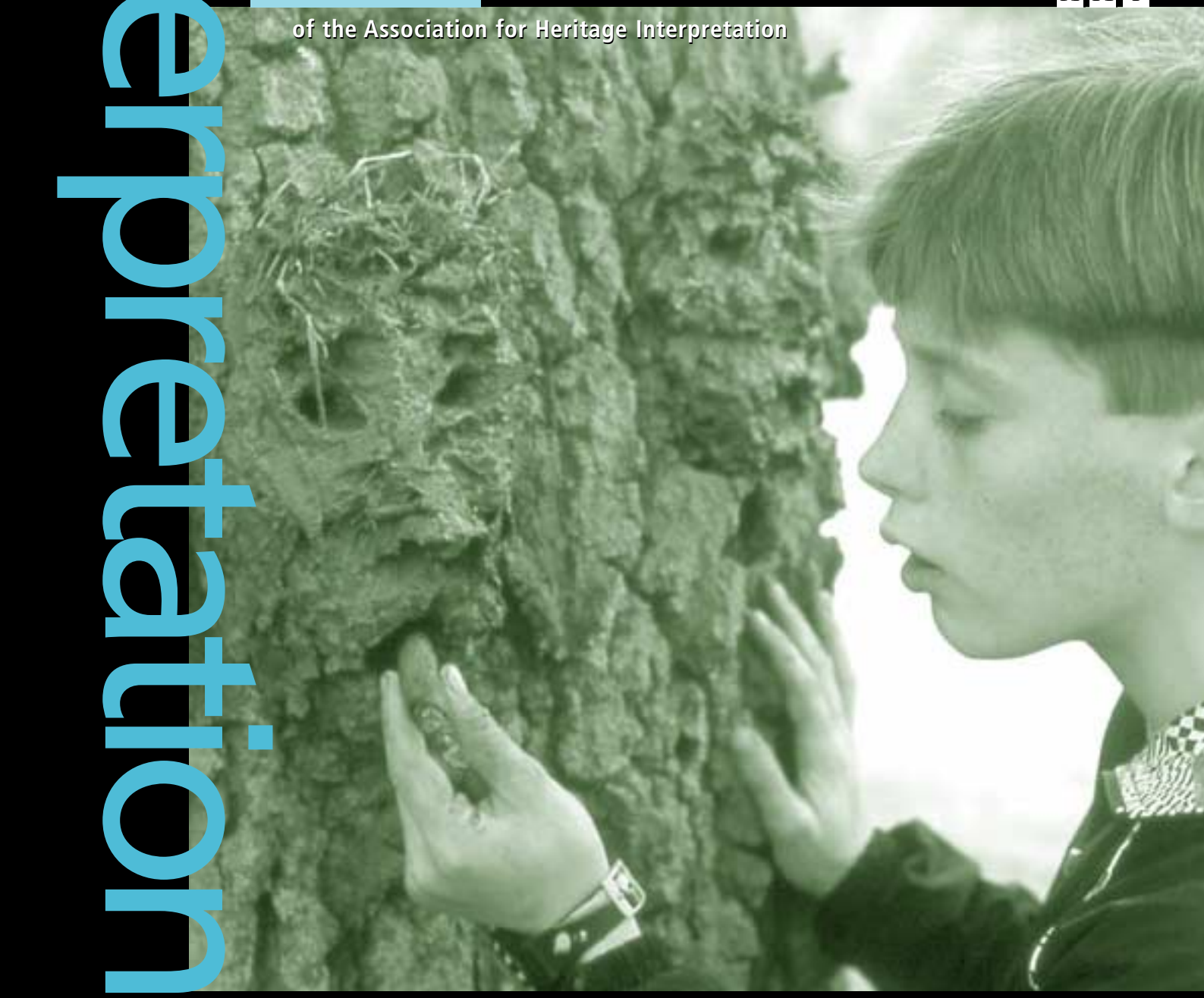

How is it for you?

Invoking emotions in interpretation

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Commissioning Editor:
David Masters
Tel: 0121 441 1198
dd.masters@virgin.net

Production Editor:
Elizabeth Newbery
Tel: 01865 793360
elizabeth@newberyandengland.com

Assistant Editor:
Rachel Minay

Design: Nicole Griffin
Carrington Griffin Design
cgd@pavilion.co.uk

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Interpretation enriches our lives through engaging emotions, enhancing experiences and deepening understanding of people, places, events and objects from past and present.

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Invoking emotions?

David Masters

Every year £billions are spent on advertising in the UK. Ask any advertising executive what the impact of this huge expenditure is and they'll tell you that 'half of it is wasted, but the trouble is knowing which half'. What they will say though, and with some certainty, is that advertising works when it associates positive emotional responses with a product. Advertisers and their clients have learnt to target an emotional response in their audience. Is interpretation any different?

It could be argued that the most important impact of any interpretive programme is for its recipients to feel that the place they have visited is meaningful to them, and that they understand something about what makes it special. The fine detail of this 'specialness' – the particular rarity of its breeding birds or architectural characteristics, for example – is perhaps less important than feeling that 'this place means something to me'.

Last year's conference *A vision for Interpretation: are we in focus?* held in Birmingham adopted a new definition of interpretation that includes a more explicit emotional dimension. This journal picks up on that development and explores some of its implications. Several conference speakers reflected this evolving emphasis, including Susan Cross whose evocative and thought-provoking poem is published on page 24.

Most interpretive programmes have learning, behavioural and emotional goals. To achieve learning outcomes, a level of emotional engagement and *meaning* is essential for the audience to have any clear recall of what they have learned.

On page 4 Ruth Taylor takes a look at the role of interpretation in bringing about behavioural change – and how this depends on meaningful and persuasive messages that address an audience's underlying beliefs.

David Newport explores how we can map emotional journeys at heritage sites and how this understanding can make our interpretation more effective. He also provides some useful guidance on 'mind mapping' interpretation. David is currently working on an emotional mapping project with Historic Royal Palaces, whose Head of Interpretation Ruth Gill has contributed an article that uses J.R.R. Tolkien's ideas about 'Suspension of Disbelief' and the creation of 'Secondary Worlds' to explore how interpreters can best engage an audience and, in Tolkein's view, 'invoke their desire'.

As we know, interpretation uses a range of media, some didactic and others more affective. The display with most impact at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, for example, is an interactive artwork based on millions of metal faces in the act of screaming. Visitors are encouraged to walk over the faces piled on the floor – a deeply uncomfortable but memorable act. As an exhibit it communicates a far greater sense of the horrors of the Holocaust than any facts and figures. Picking up on the particular role of the arts in interpretation, Gordon MacLellan explores how these media can be especially important in invoking emotional responses in our audiences.

But it is during childhood that we are most open and sensitive to our emotional world. On page 18 Alan Dyer explores some of the implications for interpretation geared at a young audience, whilst Christine Joy describes the Ian Potter Foundation Garden in the Royal Botanic Garden, Melbourne, targeting an emotional response in children.

Some of these articles may be challenging, some common sense. If you have an emotional response to this edition, if it raises your hackles or simply makes you smile, do let us know. We would warmly welcome any letters or points of debate.

David Masters is Commissioning Editor

Persuasive powers

Ruth Taylor asks whether interpretation can be effective in influencing behaviour

Whether interpretation influences behaviour is a hotly debated issue: some sceptics believe that the most interpretation can hope to do is impart some new facts; others firmly believe that interpretation can produce a real emotional response and act on behaviour.

Setting objectives

Good interpretative practice dictates that objectives should be set for your interpretation when planning a project. Veverka in his book *Interpretative Master Planning*[1] suggests using three basic kinds of objectives in developing interpretive master plans: learning, emotional and behavioural objectives. Learning objectives state what you want your visitors to learn or remember; behavioural objectives state what you want visitors to do; and emotional objectives state what you want your visitors to feel.

Ververka says that you can't begin to alter behaviour or attitudes unless you accomplish the emotional objectives. So for instance your interpretation could make visitors feel surprise, anger, sadness, happiness or pride. These emotions help visitors to remember the interpretation because they have evoked strong feelings and are instrumental in behaviour change.

Sam Ham also strongly believes that interpretation can be persuasive and influence behaviour. He similarly promotes knowing, feeling and doing objectives. He suggests that strong and compelling themes need to be used to persuade[2] – a strong theme being one that provokes a person to think or wonder.

Generic learning outcomes

A recent initiative from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) – *Inspiring learning for All*[3] – proposes the use of generic learning outcomes as a way of setting objectives for learning activities and evaluating these activities or assessing evidence of learning. The different areas of learning which are assessed are: knowledge and understanding; skills; attitudes and values; enjoyment, inspiration and creativity; action, behaviour and progression. Generic learning outcomes use change in behaviour as one of their evaluation objectives, suggesting that the MLA believes learning activities can influence behaviour.

Communication

Interpretation is essentially a two-way communication process. We use communication in our efforts to influence people. As a communication process interpretation is very closely linked to advertising – it aims to provoke and get a response. The whole purpose of advertising is to influence buying behaviour and it often does this by playing on our emotions. So how can interpretation be used most effectively to influence behaviour? Knapp et al.[4] researched the goals for programme development in interpretation and found that behaviour change outcomes were of significant importance to the interpretative field but there was little research on the effectiveness of interpretation in this area. However, there are many other areas where behaviour change has been widely researched. In particular, a lot can be learned by studying attempts to change behaviour in the health field where, for instance, the attitudes underlying smokers' behaviour has been investigated. One of the areas where behaviour change is becoming more and more important is in the way people behave towards the environment. There is a real need now to change people's environmental behaviour if we are to live sustainably. For instance, in many parts of the UK this summer a hosepipe ban has been implemented: people need to change their behaviour and conserve water. One effective way to change behaviour through interpretation is to use a persuasive communication.

The psychology of persuasion and behaviour change has been well studied with a number of different models proposed to show the underlying steps that lead to behaviour change. The model that fits best in terms of helping people to understand how behaviour can be changed is the Ajzen and Fishbein theory of reasoned action (1980)[5].

Ajzen and Fishbein: The Theory of Reasoned Action

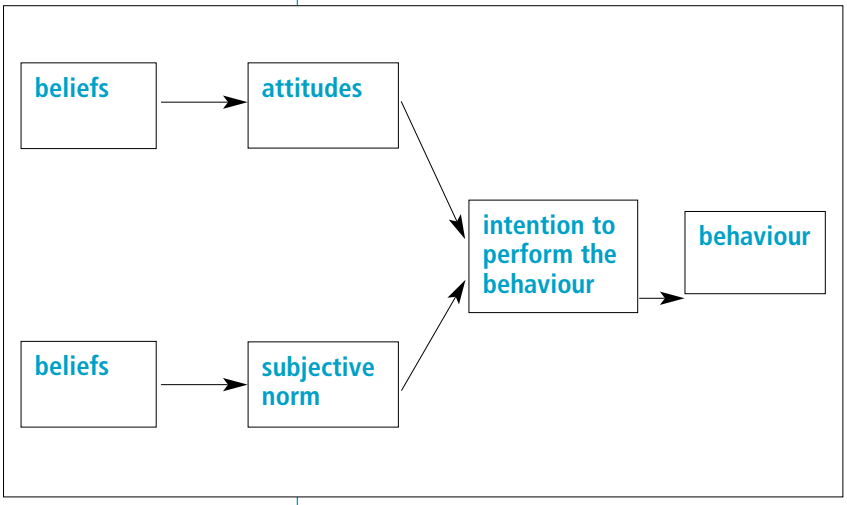
This model links the behaviour of a person to the intention to perform that behaviour (see diagram). Underlying the intention are two determinants: a personal factor which is the positive or negative evaluation of performing that behaviour (the attitude toward the behaviour) and the person's perceptions of the social pressures put on him or

'Generic learning outcomes use change in behaviour as one of their evaluation objectives suggesting that the MLA believes learning activities can influence behaviour'

Above: Chelsea Physic Garden: the conservatory next to the tearoom where the exhibition took place

her to perform the behaviour (the subjective norm). Underlying the attitude toward the behaviour are a number of beliefs that the behaviour leads to certain outcomes, and an evaluation of those outcomes. Beliefs also underlie the subjective norm that certain individuals or groups think he or she should or should not perform the behaviour. So there is a clear path of influence in order to change behaviour, by working on and influencing the beliefs underlying the attitude toward the behaviour.

In order to change behaviour you need to identify the beliefs relevant to the behaviour in question. These beliefs can then serve as the basis of the argument in the persuasive communication. So, for instance, you might want to change the behaviour of people to composting more of their garden waste and when questioned you find out that they believe that composting is very complicated. Your persuasive communication would target this belief and explain how simple it is to compost.



The objective

Botanic gardens, like zoos and museums, are in an ideal position to influence visitors' attitudes and change behaviour towards the environment and conservation, yet there is very little evidence of their engaging with visitors in this way. While working at Chelsea Physic Garden, I decided to try and influence the behaviour of visitors to be more wildlife-friendly in their own gardens. Gardening behaviour in home gardens is an area where people can be encouraged to act in an environmentally friendly way and there is a real need for behaviour change, particularly in activities such as avoiding using peat and composting waste. This work, along with two other studies eventually became a PhD researching the role of persuasive communications in changing attitudes and behaviour towards the environment[6].

The first stage of the work was to find out what the attitudes were that underlie the behaviour and the beliefs behind those attitudes. This was done by questionnaires and focus groups. Then the information gained was used in the persuasive communication. I mounted an exhibition about endangered plants and for two of the panels in the exhibition I used the persuasive communications headed 'What you can do' and 'What you can do in your garden'. The persuasion acted on the beliefs and gave a reason for carrying out the action.

What you can do

Britain is an island too. We have many plants threatened with extinction for various reasons ranging from plants being dug up by collectors to habitat destruction and damage, often through changes in agricultural practices. Everyone must be prepared to take action now if we are to prevent more species becoming extinct.

- Do not buy bulbs dug up from the wild – check the packet
- Avoid using peat and use a substitute such as coir compost
- Help protect your local wildlife habitats
- Help by joining appropriate organisations such as your local County Trust and those active in conservation worldwide

'You first need to know the beliefs underlying the behaviour'

Above: Plants with labels in the conservatory

What you can do in your garden

Almost 600,000 hectares of land in Britain is in private gardens (this is roughly the size of Devon). These gardens are important in providing food, water and shelter for birds and other wildlife, and are often a diverse habitat for many species. You can help Britain's wildlife by how you maintain your garden.

- Use organic gardening methods and avoid using chemicals i.e. pesticides
- Start a compost heap and recycle organic household waste
- Plant native trees and shrubs in your garden
- Try to learn which animal species visit your garden and observe which plant species they find useful for food
- Increase your knowledge of environmental issues, see the leaflet 'Wake up to what you can do for the environment'
- Think Green!

If we all carried out some of these activities we are more likely to give future generations an environment fit to live in.

The message

The reason to act was given in these panels as 'leaving an environment fit to live in for the next generation'. The effect of the exhibition, panels and also the leaflet 'Wake up to what you can do for the environment', which was available in the exhibition, was evaluated using questionnaires filled in by interview. Visitors were questioned on their attitudes and behaviour to wildlife-friendly gardening a) as they entered the garden, b) before they had entered the exhibition while they were in the garden and c) after they had exited the exhibition. All the people questioned were asked if they would be willing to be questioned again in a follow-up interview between one and six months later.

The follow-up questionnaire showed that more than a third of the respondents who visited the display could recall suggestions for enhancing conservation in their own gardens. Also about a third made changes in their gardening behaviour having seen the display or read the leaflet.

The effect

This research shows that interpretation can be effective in influencing behaviour but you first need to know the beliefs underlying the behaviour and target the persuasion towards those beliefs. The more the interpretation engages your visitor the better chance you have of influencing them. Making an engagement through emotions is an effective way of getting attention. At Chelsea Physic Garden the exhibition included a glasshouse with many spectacular endangered plants to get visitors' attention and interest, engaging them both visually and with scents. Moreover, when visitors were asked what they remembered about their visit the most frequent response after the plants was the atmosphere of the garden, showing a real emotional engagement on the visit.

Quick checklist

- Decide what behaviour you want to influence
- Find out beliefs underlying the attitude toward the behaviour (questionnaire/focus group)
- Devise a persuasive communication which works on those beliefs
- Pilot the persuasive communication as an element of your interpretation
- Amend if necessary
- Roll out final version and keep evaluating

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Ruth Taylor is Chair of AHI and Learning Adviser – Interpretation National Trust

Interpretation, magic and the 'Secondary World'

Ruth Gill explores the thinking of Tolkein, evaluation and mind mapping in interpretative displays at the Tower of London

In the last 15 years or so I have seen the interpretation profession start to respond meaningfully to visitor feedback, work through the possibilities of creative collaborations, draw more sophisticated connections with storytelling and absorb learning theories and styles. The way it was expressed and taught in 'my day' now seems as dated as the first Sony Walkman.

So, are we getting better at it? Well, I'm not sure. For every dusty object label that gets taken away, an inexplicable one is re-typed. We interpreters still have difficulty with the basics: explaining what we do and the usefulness of our practice to colleagues. Suddenly I find our language roams into mystical realms: 'it's about creating magic' ...'it's about raising the quality of our lives'... 'it's about creating a moment that can't be defined'.

The need to appraise

I argue that we need to reappraise. We need to start to use precise language for the art of interpretation, and we need to be able to evaluate our success. Without this, how can we ever professionally better our practice and learn? A simple example of this can be taken from Historic Royal Places' (HRP) latest visitor survey. One question revealed that 97% of our visitors thought the audio tour at the Tower of London was either excellent or good in terms of enjoyment, and 92% thought it was excellent or good in terms of information provided. To many, this means that the audio tour should be viewed as a relative success, and without a clear aim for interpretation, I would have to agree – but more of this later.

'We need to start to use precise language for the art of interpretation, and we need to be able to evaluate our success'

Suspending disbelief

An unexpected inspiration in my thinking about interpretation has been the writer, J.R.R. Tolkein. In 1939, he gave a lecture to the University of St. Andrew's entitled *On Fairy Stories* (the lecture has been reprinted in *The Monsters and the Critics*, 1997). Although his subject is fairy stories and storytelling, I believe that it has compelling connections with the wider practice of interpretation. In this lecture he talked about the difference between the 'Willing Suspense of Disbelief' and the 'Secondary World'. He says that if the storyteller's art is good enough, he can make his audience capable of literary belief (i.e. written stories, plays, poems etc) – the 'Willing Suspense of Disbelief'. The audience takes on the action and understands it within the terms of the play or story. He argues that it is a substitute for the real thing.

Tolkein said this isn't good enough. If the storyteller is creative enough "he makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true'. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises the spell is broken... or rather the art has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive world Secondary World from outside". He says that a symptom of having been in the Secondary World is desire. Stories that are successful awaken desire.

This raises some very interesting definitions for us. We know that we learn when we feel that the subject is relevant to us (few of us learn for the sake of acquiring knowledge in and of itself!). If the subject has a strong association with memory then a significant point of learning can occur. To affect someone's life in such a way as to facilitate a Secondary World experience could potentially have a very powerful impact indeed.

Did they suspend disbelief?

To go back to the audio tour example: of the 97% who enjoyed the tour, can we extract how many of them have learnt something (using the broadest possible definition of learning, ranging from acquiring facts to influencing values and behaviour)? Did any of them find it so engaging that they could suspend their disbelief? Did any achieve a Secondary World experience? I am reminded of George Hein's chapter called *The Constructivist Museum* where he says: 'People need to connect to what is familiar, but learning, by definition, goes beyond the known; it leads to new 'agreeable places' (*Learning in*

Above: *Gunpowder Treason* at the Tower of London

Museums, 2005:176). I wonder if we have only just started to think about what forms these 'agreeable places' might take. If we can evolve a way of describing them, perhaps we can become better equipped to facilitate people's journeys to them.

Mind maps

The next question is about how we might go about doing this. For a year or more we've been experimenting with mind mapping at various stages of exhibition development. Mind maps are useful because they help us begin to understand people's preconceptions and misconceptions on various subjects and suggest where we need to put our efforts. Used as a summative evaluation tool, mind mapping helps us to understand what effect our interpretation work might have had on individuals. For instance, mind maps produced for a display called *Gunpowder Treason* (which told the story of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, making connections to contemporary political and social life) yielded some interesting results. We could clearly tell that many people were able to articulate their thoughts about the subject more confidently after their visit. They were surer about the nature of historic events and many were able to cite particular facts. A level of emotional engagement was clear too – the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London (which started six days after the exhibition opened) were prevalent in their minds and our audience powerfully expressed connections between the past and the present.

'The audience takes on the action and understands it within the terms of the play or story. Tolkein argued that it is a substitute for the real thing'

Understand reactions

Mind mapping however, is limited in the sense that it could be charged with merely evaluating peoples' memories, rather than their learning potential. How might we start to get 'inside' (or 'alongside') visitors to understand how they have reacted during their visit? Another method that we are embarking on is evaluating people's emotional journeys. Understanding and appealing to an audience's emotional responses to aid communication is, in some ways, as 'old as the hills' (Aristotle dedicated his *Rhetoric Book 2* to describing this very subject!); however, it is still very difficult to do. It poses a Schrödinger's Cat conundrum: how can we test and evaluate someone's emotional responses without falsely affecting the outcome? We are employing David Newport, from *Effective Vision* (who has contributed articles on this subject see pages 9–12) to lead us through the process. He'll be able to train us in the skill of gaining the trust of visitors, so that they feel they can contribute their feedback whilst having no social expectations for the outcome. We should have preliminary results in June 2006.

Despite the long history of learning, we still have a long way to go before we can draw any defining conclusions about emotions and interpretation. I believe that it's important to not confuse woolly and potentially shallow terms like 'magic' with other more useful ones, like Tolkein's valuable notion of Secondary World experiences. After all, Tolkein said himself: 'Leave magic to the operations of magicians'. Interpretation is no more about fooling or tricking the audience, than storytelling is. Instead, it's an art form that should be discussed and regarded as such.

Ruth Gill is Head of Interpretation at Historic Royal Places, London

Emotional journeys

David Newport looks at how simple, thinking tools can help to clarify interpretative planning at heritage sites

Every experience we have affects us at an emotional level. Each experience is a journey because each is a series of events marked by the passage of time. Imagine you design an interpretive emotional journey that engages people to return more often, advocate you more, and think well of you when they reflect on their experience? How good would that be?

Immersion in an experience is more powerful than visiting a number of individual items. The stronger the sense of a connected journey, the more coherent and connected will be the emotions. Just as in a good story, one element leads into the next, and the next, so that you 'can't put the book down'. An engaging, ultimately positive experience engenders a predisposition to learn, debate, and adapt attitudes and behaviour. Good interpretation tells a story. Great experiences contain its clear message. Word of mouth provides free advocacy – if you have that clear interpretation message to propagate.

What are the benefits of mapping emotional journeys?

Understanding emotional journeys enables you to:

- provide a clear, focused experience and message
- reduce wasted effort of interpreter and visitor
- engage peoples' energy, focusing it on behaviours that increase your site's value
- demonstrate the efficacy of design to funders.

Mapping considers:

- pacing of emotional change
- contrasting the emotional spectrum of the experience – peaks and troughs or one gradual change?
- event points – what are the triggers for the emotion at a particular point?
- reflection points where visitors can assimilate what they've experienced, prior to moving on
- dead spots where visitors disengage
- how the visitor is engaged
- how the visitor leaves, what they take away.

Are peoples' responses sufficiently similar?

Yes, they are. Variations do occur as a result of personal expectations, yet the fundamental character of each site comes through in peoples' experiences. Multiple visits allow patterns to be revealed, expert assessment enables key points to be identified. Only one situation exists where it is intrinsically difficult to have an emotional impact on people. It's when they are so focused on a task that no task-irrelevant cues affect them, for example, a couple deep in conversation.

How do we assess emotions?

People assess emotions in many ways. The desire for measurability drives the use of easily quantifiable symptoms, or checklists. Our approach is different. We allow people to express their insights, in their language, at their pace, and in a way that makes sense to them. The core data is clean and true to the source. Drawing together the threads is then our joy, presenting clients with a rich picture of the emotional journey you offer.

Rather than describe techniques, let's consider outputs. What would the mapping look like? Consider an outdoor visitor site. Below are excerpts of the holistic picture provided.

Site

Outdoor environment: gardens with a small lodge. The following appear to be the goals, stated on posters in the lodge.

- Rest and relaxation
- Education
- Conservation
- Inspiration

Visit

November 17 2005, 14:00hrs. Bright, dry, cold. Firm underfoot.

Individual. Goal: to enjoy beautiful afternoon out, benefiting from a walk in the sun and fresh air. No apparent learning goals. No prior site information.

Inferences

- The first area of engagement, the entrance, held no sense of welcome. For the first five minutes I wondered if I was allowed to be there. It was not until other people arrived, parking in the visitors'

area, that I felt some relief.

- At times the wonderful views and light playing on the foliage amazed me. The variety of plants and environments created in such a small space was surprising.
- At times I felt lost, both within the site and in my sense of place. I hadn't discerned what the site was about. There were sporadic plaques with notes, yet at no point had I got a sense of mission or passions. The notices by the car park were mostly warnings, with a note on site history.
- I only went to the lodge out of curiosity, and for completeness to map the journey. Being unsigned it seemed unimportant. Within the lodge were toilets, a little meeting room and a vestibule with four images suggesting the site goals.
- I left the site much as I had entered, wondering whether I was allowed to be there. The peaks of wonderment overridden by a feeling that I might have been, in a sense, trespassing.

Critical decision

How to encourage a better experience, and offer community value, whilst maintaining the environment and its conservation.

Recommendation

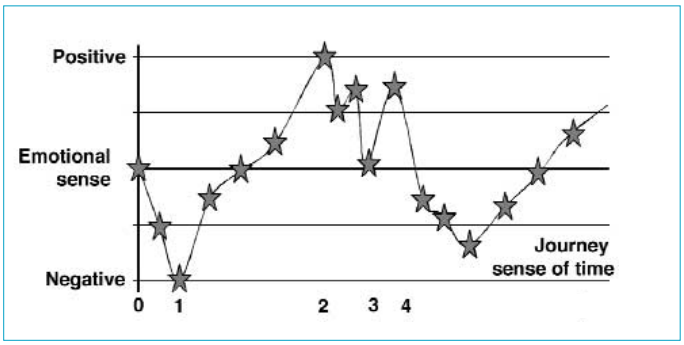
- Welcome people
- Engage them in understanding what the site does, its goals and mission
- Manage expectations
- Help people orient themselves – simple redesign and repositioning of the plaques

Publicity

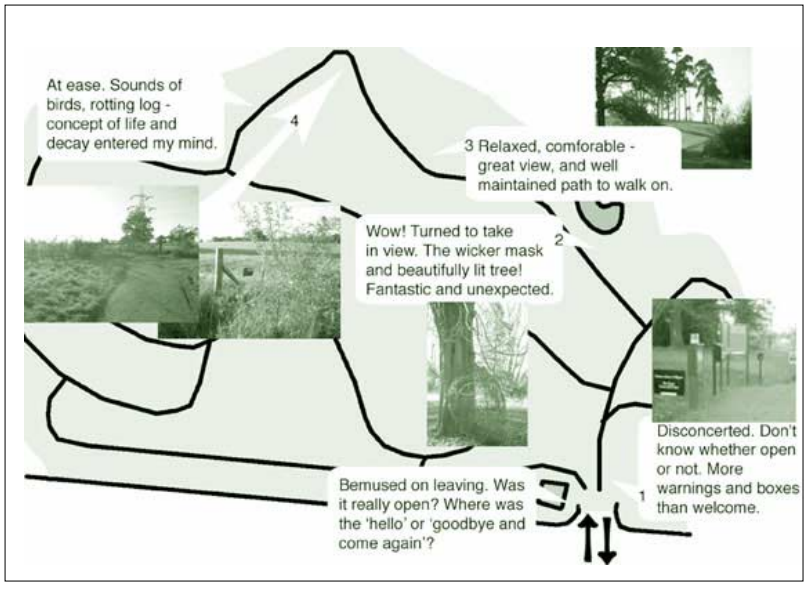
- The site is an easy drop-in place for passers-by, many of whom will not have researched their visit
- To replicate this, publicity was viewed post-visit
- The website is much brighter and more inviting than the site itself. It's easy to use with clear topics. A different place is sensed to that visited. Viewing this before the visit would have added to the unease on the actual visit.
- A sister site is presented with seemingly greater importance. Perhaps that's how the staff and site are treated – it would explain some of the issues.

Emotional journey graph

The numbers refer to points on the journey indicated on the map below:



The map is a site plan, with photographs to act as reminders of the cues. Feelings and comments are noted. The comments are open expressions of the person's internal dialogue, or expand on senses or feelings.



Narrative ref	Commentary	Possible action
1	Disconcerted – don't know whether open or not. No real welcome.	
	Tranquil – interrupted by signage, particularly the curious car park 'In' and 'Out', funny parking ticket machine, brochure machine (didn't notice what it was until I paid a closer look when taking photos), and small donation box. Most of the signs seemed to be directives.	Review and redesign entrance area for a more consistent and welcoming feel.
2	Wow! Turned to take in view. The wicker mask and beautifully lit tree! Fantastic, and unexpected.	
	Distracted – background urban traffic noise. Tractors and kit detract from countryside feel.	More of this? Moments of surprise in a calm walk.
	Now realise a little bit more. First plaque I come to explains the meadow area management. Feel resolved.	
	Not welcomed – another directive to keep to paths.	Rephrase to engage and explain why.
3 Point where I'm starting to engage with the site.	Relaxed, comfortable – great view, and well-maintained path.	
	Weird noise – partridge flying close by. Wow!	
	Feeling of pride in the environment, quite relaxed (still a sense of gate-crashing).	
4	Bemused, disoriented. Don't know where I'm going!	
	Disappointed – would've easily missed sign on fence about hedgerow.	Resolve signage issues. Either obvious or none at all. Use plaques instead.
	Pylons detract, feel compromised, not at ease, saddened.	Opportunity to emphasise value of conservation.
	Paths lose clarity on entering high tree cover. Bench memoriam very weathered and illegible. Curiosity – little bits seem forgotten – is this intentional or is the polish just skin-deep?	

From this excerpt

There are two negative areas. The first negative at the start is unhelpful. It takes time to overcome it. First impressions count – people want to feel welcomed. People usually recall the first and last moments of an experience and 3–7 other elements that stand out for them. A moment that detracts for a visitor may not mean much to you. For them it can be a key experiential factor.

The second negative is an opportunity for emotional contrast. Poor signage and feeling lost occupy the mind, distracting people from your message. The distraction undermines the impact of the pylons by lowering the positive feel immediately beforehand. Resolving this so that the visitor can be struck by the contrast of modernity and nature, with

a plaque describing the imposition of technology could enhance the visitor's concern for conservation (or whatever aligned message is desired).

Summary

Engaging people in an experience that is ultimately positive enhances their learning. With good interpretive planning an emotional journey can be created communicating a strong, underlying and positive message. A message able to inspire better behaviour outcomes as well as advocacy. As can be inferred from this brief case excerpt, some interpretation does not always achieve this. Such a study, done to identify key issues, forms the basis of an evolving piece of work to support insight and interpretation planning. Encouraging staff to help develop this understanding of how visitors interact with the site enables them to engage more with their own role. The more the staff engage positively with the site and with visitors, the better and more memorable will be the visit.

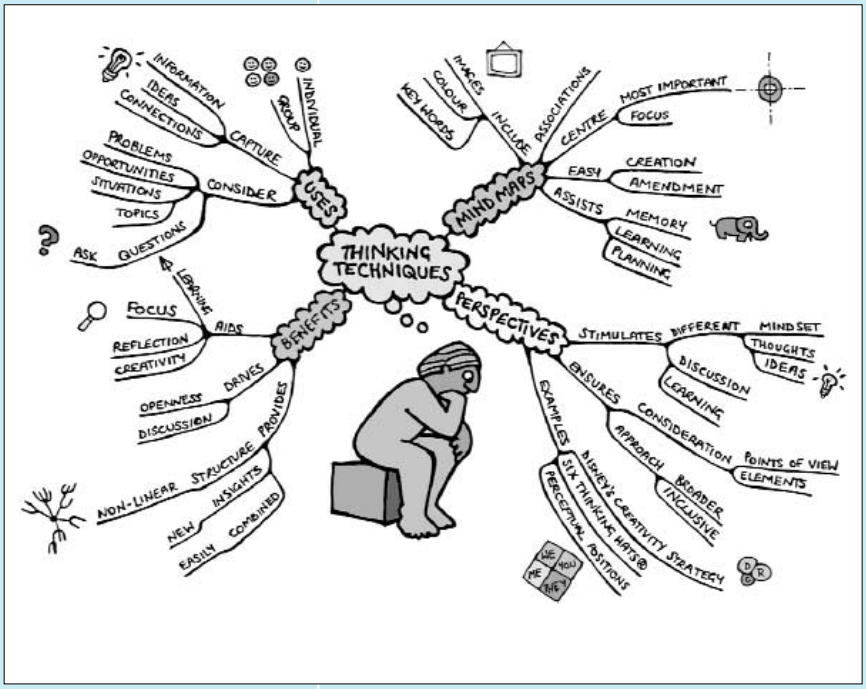
Addendum after writing the article

Debbie Law loves arboretums and gardens. She's a local resident to the gardens in the example. I asked her what she felt about them: 'It's bizarre. There's no information, and you don't feel as though you're wanted, so I've never been.'

David Newport is a consultant
email: david@effectivevision.co.uk

Mind maps

David Newport describes how to mind map



Good planning uses good tools. That applies to interpretative planning for sites and exhibitions as much as anything else. Some of the most valuable tools are simple thinking techniques that help you, and your colleagues, explore opportunities and challenges in different ways. These tools can be mixed, and, with practice, become natural and quick to use. Here are a few in brief!

How to mind map (Tony Buzan[1])

Mind mapping is an amazing approach for exploring all manner of situations, and an efficient way of capturing thoughts. Points are arranged around a core issue. They are linked in the way our minds work, by association.

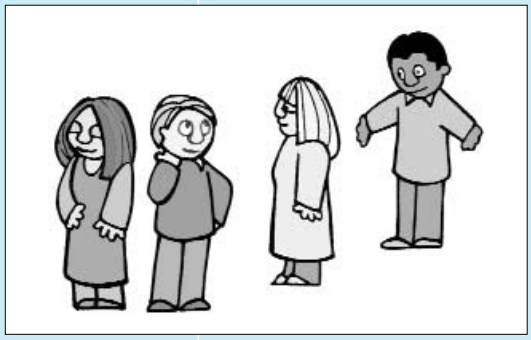
Creating a mind map

- Clearly identify your core issue
- Identify the next most important ideas that stem from the core issue, printing the minimum of words or phrases along the stems

- Continue with lower level detail, working outward
- Include images, colour, interconnections to help you derive value
- Let your mind intuitively create the map, your mind works quicker intuitively than with logical thought
- Review and refine the map

Using different perspectives

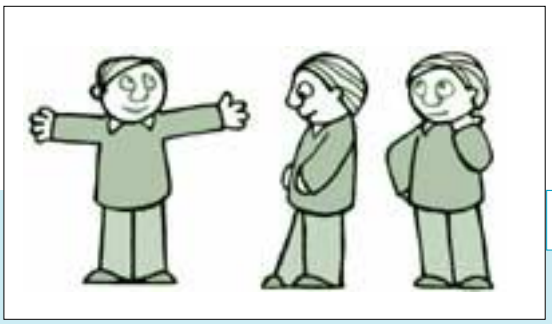
We all see issues from particular perspectives. These are usually ourselves as, say, friend, parent, customer, or specialist. The way we do this is often unstructured, biasing our contribution. 'Different perspective' techniques use mental or physical anchoring of a specific identity to help people consider an issue from the defined perspective. All have an iterative element, the person (or people) involved cycle around the perspectives to improve their understanding or solution. Three such techniques use different perspectives in a structured way to explore issues and identify solutions.



Perceptual positions

Insight into another person's perspective. For your focus situation:

- talk about it from your perspective
- step into the other person's shoes and talk about it from their perspective
- step out of the situation and talk about it from an observer's view
- step even further out and view the whole system – the broader environment
- come back to being you with all the new insights.



Disney's creativity strategy

(Disney used this with perceptual positioning to check he had a great story.) Having identified your focus, a situation or challenge:

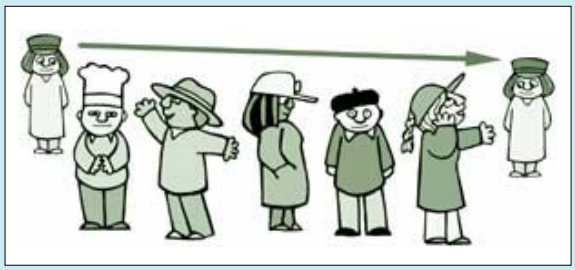
- capture lots of ideas by being a **DREAMER**
- explore each idea as a **REALIST** to understand how they could be implemented and any changes that are needed
- step back to imagine and **CRITIQUE** the whole situation. Does it meet your needs?

Go through this a number of times to develop clear solutions in appropriate detail.

Six hats thinking® (Edward de Bono[2])

This technique uses perspectives within a clearly structured frame. Apart from the facilitator (**CAP**), everyone wears the same hat at the same time to think in the same way, concurrently. You progress from one hat to the next to clarify, explore and resolve the issue raised.

- **CHEF** presents **FACTS**
- **JUNGLE** generates **IDEAS**
- **HARD HAT** evaluates the **POSITIVE**, logically
- **BERET** evaluates the **NEGATIVE**, logically
- **BASEBALL** expresses sensed **EMOTIONS**
- **CAP** chairs and summarises



Have fun!

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David Newport

Is it art or interpretation?

Gordon MacLellan questions whether art is interpretation in the sense of informing visitors about environmental sites

When does 'environmental art' become 'interpretation'? When is it an interesting experience that adds richness to a visit and when is it just some pile of pretentious rubbish loitering in a field? As an environmental artsworker (rather than an artist: I aim to use creative ideas for what I hope are educational and interpretive ends) these are questions I often ask myself – and all too often find myself agreeing with Richard Mabey's rather jaded comment 'Most of the artists seem to have little understanding of, or interest in, the places they're working in, and the pieces they make might just as well have been in an uptown gallery'[1].

Hopefully, our interpretation is already artistic: designed with elegance and imagination and responded to with interest, comment and inspiration. But is 'art' also 'interpretation' in the sense of something that rouses, intrigues, informs, provokes or stimulates our visitors?

Site specific

Think of 'environmental art' as pieces installed on site, or associated with a site, or derived from a site. Those 'pieces' need not just be sculpture but might include performance, poetry, story or music. Embracing 'art' becomes a huge, spiralling subject in itself and this article could now dissolve in a wealth of argument, discussion and counter-argument. So let's pin it down. I meet people talking about, using, installing 'environmental art' as works that visitors encounter either on site or in an adjacent visitor centre or maybe in an exhibition that is still definitely associated with a site or group of sites. So that is what I will concentrate on here. No absolutes here; there will always be exceptions to everything and all that I say is personal so object to it as cheerfully as you please!

Perhaps only the artist herself knows if a piece of work is 'environmental': only the artist really knows what route their inspiration followed that led to the final production. As the people who experience the finished product, we can decide if we appreciate the work or not, but how can we know if it is 'environmental'? That is fine if work is presented simply as 'art', but if its presence is also presented as a valid piece of interpretation we can be much more ruthless. 'Interpretation' implies definite goals. Those goals may not necessarily be easily measurable ones but any artwork chosen to serve an interpretive end needs to communicate effectively with people.

'Perhaps only the artist herself knows if a piece of work is "environmental"'

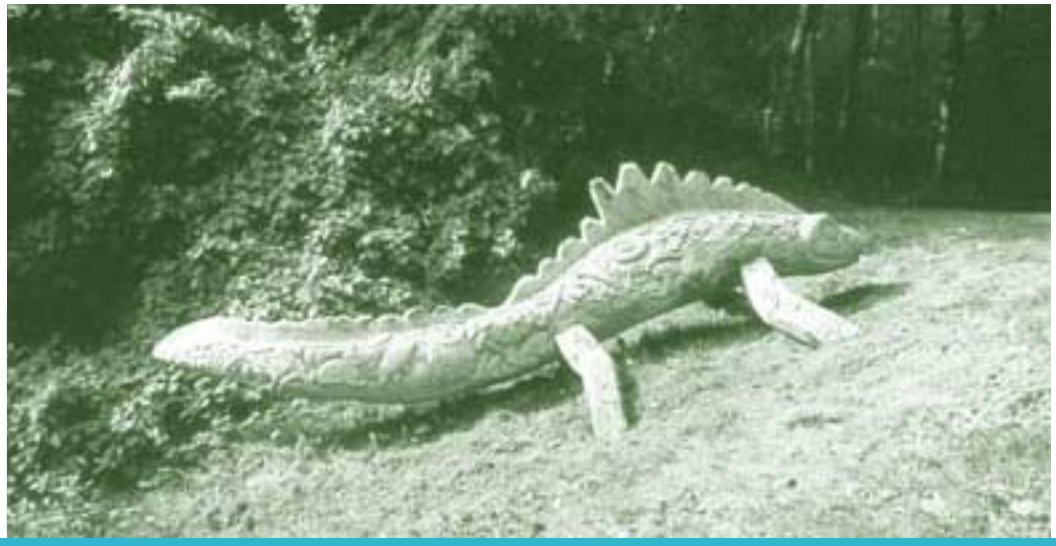
Inspiration from place

Start with inspiration. An artist claiming to be environmental should, I feel, draw inspiration from the site in question. A personal experience of the place should have informed the germinating seed of the work: it should grow out of a relationship between artist and place. And for the public encountering that artwork later, that encounter should contribute to the richness of their visit to the site.

That might sound ludicrously obvious but reflect upon sculptures brought in, bought in, whose roots never touched the earth of your park. Or perhaps a touring show, one of those wonderful travelling companies who bring an evening or two of glamour and excitement and lots of extra people, picnics and litter to a venue. The experience they offer may be, often is, exquisite and moving. But does it change people's understanding of, or response to, the place itself?

Effective – but is it 'good'?

That is where the argument settles for me: effective environmental art should enrich visitors' experience of a place. 'Effective' rather than 'good' because to be effective the piece serves an interpretive end, while being 'good' it might be an exquisite masterpiece that would be as delicious anywhere and has no connection to the sites. 'Effective', too, because it



'A personal experience of the place should have informed the germinating seed of the work: it should grow out of a relationship between artist and place'

Above: A Great Crested Newt decorated with individual designs contributed by passing members of the public

ARTIST: PHIL BEWS, RISLEY MOSS NATURE RESERVE1996

might not raise pleasant reactions, it might challenge, upset, provoke and, hopefully, wake long-term possibilities of change. That might not seem 'good' to some people but it will certainly be effective. A friend of mine did a performance project wheeling a wheelbarrow half filled with (papier-mâché!) dog-poo and half with flowers round the streets of Nottingham while dressed as a flower herself, offering people the choice 'which would you rather have on our streets?' Effective, provocative, generating long-term positive commitment, but for many people not 'good' or 'nice'!

Conversation and reflection

Unobtrusively placed in central Manchester there is a collection of poems set into the pavement, poems about words slipping through cracks in the pavement. It is a gentle, subtle piece of work that stops people and has shoppers trailing their shopping along Tibb Street seeking out one poem after another.

Art may provoke strong feelings but often for our work, art that generates wonder is, I feel, more useful. Provocation calls for discussion: people want to talk, to argue, to find out what they can do. Good interpretation there, but have you got someone on hand to serve that need and facilitate those discussions? Or do people leave that encounter in earnest conversation with each other and completely miss the rest of your beautiful site? If people are simply sent away with no follow-up, does the momentum get lost, fizzling out in a sense of dissatisfaction?

Try turning to wonder and art that encourages people to look more carefully. A measure of an effective sculpture trail might not be in the size, number or spectacular nature of its installations, but in the reactions it produces. Watch an audience on a sculpture trail. Do they start identifying just about anything as a sculpture: fallen logs, or an arrangement of mossy stones? Effective? You might measure success by the proportion of people who actually sat at that 'listening bench' and counted birdsongs. Effective – it has encouraged people to find for themselves a new experience of a familiar site – and it is a personal experience at that: not one mediated through a panel or a guided walk, but a quiet individual moment of connection.

Interpretation?

Would this count as 'interpretation'? If effective art can provoke discussion and wonder does it add to a greater understanding of a site? That might be a harder question to answer. But art isn't there to provide answers to questions. It should be there to generate emotional responses. If your artwork simply delivers a blunt, obvious message then is it art, or artistic interpretation, or blatant advertising and propaganda? Equally, if it is a wonderful abstract creation that then needs its own several panels to explain its purpose and intention, is it then anything other than annoying?

Interactive art – storytellers, poets, dancers, performers, can all weave understanding into their contact with your visitors. It is often a direct communication: they meet people eye to eye, so surely they can impart some definite, useful interpretation? As a storyteller, I can tell very factual

stories, taking knowledge and understanding and stirring a creative mix. But I know the best stories describe places, or species in storytelling terms; not in ecological, land management or heritage terms but as places where adventures might happen, as beings to whom adventures have happened. Their purpose as stories is not necessarily to give people a defined body of scientific information but to open them up to a set of possibilities, to an awareness of the excitement of the world around us, to the value and wonder and uncertainty that can lie within the midge that bites you or the worm that squirms. Art should not be expected to meet precise interpretive goals, but it can be expected to intrigue, enchant and carry people into new ways of experiencing a site. Perhaps we should make sure our objectives for interpretation include personal emotional opportunities as well as knowledge and understanding components. Harder to measure, but hopefully opening possibilities of lasting growth and change, and a real change in awareness in how people value and respond to a site.

Below: This toadstool sculpture was designed to highlight individual species and to draw people deeper into a site

ARTIST: LYNNE KIRKHAM, RISLEY MOSS NATURE RESERVE
1996

'The Shrubbery Infants go on dancing determinedly, the Dragons still loiter, Faeries still frolic and more people come'

Communities in the creative process

The process that brings artwork onto a site could also be part of a creative, interpretive process. Involving people in the growth of that artwork can add to their understanding of a site: what is there to interpret? What art forms would be relevant and in personal terms: what aspects of a site do they value? What would they like to share with others? Drawing the local community into that creative process can be an epic in its own right: with enough intrigues, feuds, frustrations, power struggles, despairs, joys and defeats to satisfy Homer several times over, but it is still part of the whole process and might be the best way of ensuring a long-term future for your art work – or any interest in it at all. Talk to people. A campaign charting progress and development through the local paper is a great way of offending some folk but probably recruiting more.

In recent years the Panopticons project run by Mid-Pennine Arts in East Lancashire has generated huge amounts of public interest and discussion[2]. Here, a series of '21st century Landmarks' are being erected across East Lancashire. The project has involved local communities at all stages in the process: generating huge amounts of interest, discussion and some controversy.

Celebrating sites

Much of my work involves the creation of celebrations where most of what we do evolves in direct response to participants' reactions to a site. Here, while we may be working with specific groups, on site we will encounter all sorts of site users from intrigued dog-walkers stopping for a chat to confused teenagers finding their usual hangouts being populated by dragons and excited five-year-olds. Our underlying brief is often to 'invigorate communities' encouraging people to come and explore, to be creative and find their own language for expressing what they feel about a place. As a project reaches completion, a finale might escalate unexpectedly. More and more people arrive, walking in from all over the local estate, the carefully planned sequences of children's performances waiver before a rising tide. Not quite what we had planned but the Shrubbery

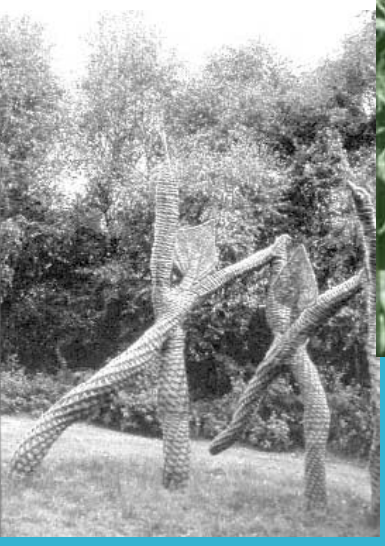
Infants go on dancing determinedly, the Dragons still loiter, Faeries still frolic and more people come, and more. More people than had been seen together on that site in years. People here to enjoy, to appreciate moments, to peer up into twilight canopies for strange birds, to point and laugh and dance and in the end to watch, to wait, to listen as a leaf falls.

Don't ever make the mistake of thinking that you make the decisions about what is 'good' environmental art: that judgement will be made by the people who experience it. You, or some committee, may make the decisions about artists, payment, theme and placement, may plan for effectiveness, but value comes from the people who view the work.

There is a delicate balance between the artist's view of what they are doing and those of your team and the public. So how are we to know what will be good, what would be effective? Are any of us art critic enough to judge? Can we find time and enthusiasm for community consultation? Are we brave enough to recognise that in the end we have to let go and hope – and to have that argument and carry it?

Right: The haunting faces of mud-fairies and a dragon inspired by the question 'what does, might or should live here?'

ENCHANTED WOODLAND PROJECT, CREEPING TOAD & MID-PENNINE ARTS, ARDEN HALL, ACCRINGTON, 2005



Above: Willow sculpture inspired by the sinuous forms of birch trunks and the light movement of birch leaves

ARTIST: LYNNE KIRKHAM, RISLEY MOSS NATURE RESERVE 1996

Listening

We can start by listening – make sure the artists listen. Are their plans flexible enough to respond to your site and the ideas, skills and enthusiasm of the groups involved, but firm enough to offer structure and confidence? Those artists should be there to support, challenge and inspire people to move into new areas of skill and understanding, not to dictate a defined product and use the public simply as cheap labour for their own predetermined outcomes.

The same goes for other performers, and for sculptors or other artists to an extent. Listen to them carefully: are you simply the stage where their personal glory will be strutted, or do they bring something that needs the touch of your site to wake it into its glory, that will draw its distinctiveness from your trees, your flowers, your river. Do your artists listen to the place where their inspiration should be coming from?

Environmental art, 'effective' environmental art is about emotion. It should not be expected to add whole heaps of understandings to visitors' experience of a site but it should provoke a new perception of the site. Look for art that wakes a sense of wonder and sends visitors on their way for a few moments, at least, quiet and wondering, watching the world unfold anew around them.

'Are you simply the stage where their personal glory will be strutted, or do the artists bring something that needs the touch of your site to wake it into its glory?'

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Gordon MacLellan is an ecologist, writer and artist
Email: creepingtoad@btinternet.com

Playing with emotions

Alan Dyer looks at the issues involved in appealing to children's emotions through interpretation

Right: From schoolchildren to wood nymphs
PHOTO: ALAN DYER

'I sincerely believe that for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is not so important to know *as to* feel. *If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow...'*
Rachel Carson '*The Sense of Wonder*'

Fertile imaginations

Much of my career has involved digging and delving in that fertile soil of emotions and senses – sharing the wonders of the natural world with children and 'grown-ups' of all ages – exploring, wondering, getting wet and dirty, dissolving in ecstasy and laughter and sometimes crying.

The emotions I am nurturing are mostly positive and joyous – but when we are dealing with sensitive issues that can evoke a strong emotional response we try our best to respond to individual needs. We know from our own experience how an 'emotional' element to an already interesting experience ensured a lifelong memory – the day we were scared, inspired, awestruck or fell in love.

Below: Wattle and daub – practical, sensory, dirty and fun
PHOTO: ALAN DYER

Moral issues

But am I right to be 'playing with people's emotions'? Are *we*, as interpretation experts, right to even think about 'invoking emotions' in our visitors? Or is this yet another area in which we must beware breaking some health and safety regulation, nervous of offending political correctness or upsetting litigation conscious administrators? If it is, then I am happy to challenge such ideas robustly!

'Are *we*, as interpretation experts, right to even think about 'invoking emotions' in our visitors?'

For many years I have taken Rachel Carson's seminal essay *The Sense of Wonder* (first published in July 1956 in *Woman's Home Companion* under the title *Help Your Child to Wonder*) as the words that guide my teaching. She emphasises the need for adults to share the experience, at the child's level and with a childlike attitude: imbued with a sense of discovery, adventure, enjoyment and a deeply emotional response.

Another great influence on my teaching was in Cumbria (UK) listening to Colin Mortlock (one of those responsible for changing outdoor pursuits to adventure education and the integration of environmental awareness into adventure education) describe experience as happening along the continuum of:

Boredom ⟷ Terror

Some boredom is 'normal' for children during any extended activity; it only becomes a problem if it lasts too long. Terror should never, ever happen. So where should you aim to be? The emotional level will be different for every individual and will (and indeed, **should**) shift up and down that continuum throughout the experience. Therefore, the need for a sensitive, involved adult with clear objectives and exemplary planning is paramount.

Roger Greenway described Mortlock's philosophy as '...closely aligned with John Dewey's theory of experience, viewing experience as emerging from the coming together of all that is accumulated from past experience and how that interacts surrounding circumstances e.g., the activity, the teacher, the environment, the group, etc.' This must surely apply as much to a museum experience as a mountain trek or rock climbing.

Top: Time to sit, listen and stare
PHOTO: ALAN DYER
Above: Becoming a falcon and a mouse
PHOTO: ALAN DYER

... born romantics all, spend much of their time in the world of the imagination and living out their daydreams

Austin (2001) describes this in 'marketing' terms: 'The issues identified place significant challenges on how marketers communicate with potential visitors and other stakeholders of the site and require the marketing function to take cognisance of the different emotional states of visitors.'

So, how often do you consider the emotional state of your visitors? Does it matter? Does being a multicultural society make a difference? Cole et al. (2002) thinks it does – but they have no real practical advice on dealing with it: '...although cultures vary in terms of how their members appraise situations, communicate emotions, and act on them, little is known about how culture influences children's emotional reactions.'

Born romantics

Children are highly energetic in short bursts, but they are also more sensitive than most adults. In the first place, children, born romantics all, spend much of their time in the world of the imagination and living out their daydreams. Myths and fairy tales, accumulations of centuries of folk-dreams and of deep psychological import, offer far richer food for the imagination – and the intellect – than most children can create on their own. Software game writers and really good interpreters/educators know that very well! Children of the age group we are concerned with experience the world much more through the senses and emotions than through the intellect – and let us not be constrained by the school science idea that there are only five senses, Bruce Durie describes over 20 in a *New Scientist* article!

Wild at heart

When children are taken on an adventure, they quickly forget their modern cultural conditioning and return to the primordial state of their distant ancestors: the thin veneer of civilisation falls away and they exult in a new sense of freedom and wonder in the face of beauty and mystery. And, given the opportunity, they return again and again: the spirit of the wild has entered their souls and imaginations. It has become precious to them and they yearn to be at one with it. How can we do anything without engaging at the emotional level – we certainly will remember the day we dissolved in tears – of laughter or other high emotion.

> *'....we must constantly remember that it should not be the education of the intellect but the education of* feeling *should receive the place of honour in schools...'*
>
> Rabrindranth Tagore: *Siksa*

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Alan Dyer is co-director of the Centre for Sustainable Futures at the University of Plymouth. The Centre is one of the HEFCE funded Centres for Excellence in Teaching Learning (CETL)
Email: alan.dyer@plymouth.ac.uk

The delight factor

Christine Joy explains how emotions have guided the development of the design and educational strategies at the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden, Melbourne

Above: Inspiring awe
Below: Hershey Children's Garden, Cleveland, USA
PHOTOS: CHRISTINE JOY

In 2005, the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden (IPFCG) opened in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne. It is 'a place where children can delight in nature and discover a passion for plants. It is a garden that celebrates the imagination and fosters the creative nature of play'. (IPFCG Vision statement)

Feelings and personal development

For many years educators have spoken of the importance of the emotions in the learning process. At the beginning of 20th century, the 4H (Hand, Heart, Head, Health) movement in the US, for example, identified feelings and personal development as crucial to both healthy living and the learning process. Those who have written about the role of the environment in learning are perhaps most passionate in their eloquence. *Nothing Without Joy* (Malaguzzi), *A Sense of Wonder* (Carson) and *A Symphony of the Senses* (Jenkins), among many others. All seek to communicate the intensity of the experience where the emotions are integral to the learning process and the depth of feeling that environmental learning can bring to the child's feelings.

So what is our objective as facilitators of emotional experience? For me, I hope that there are life-changing moments that trigger a new way of seeing and feeling about plants, the landscape and the interaction of them with other living things. Within this context we choose not to preach about the destruction of the world's natural ecosystems and the depletion of its resources, or place responsibilities on small shoulders. Importantly, the choice of taking that responsibility now rests with the young person and, as they move into their questioning teens, are able to make decisions about their own role in sustainable living and environmental activity.

Touch and feel

It is no coincidence that the same word, *touch*, is used in our language for defining both the sense of feeling and to be moved by emotion. It is not only the sense of touch but all the senses that feed and enrich our emotions. And it is this remarkable combination that triggers and enhances memory. Perhaps it is no coincidence either that *sense*, the word that defines the way we experience the world, also means to have knowingness or wisdom, as in *good sense*. There are also interesting connections of definition between *feel* (to touch) and *feel* (be affected emotionally).

Many educators stress the importance of the senses as learning tools. The outdoors is a sensory wonderland, and gardens and wild places especially provide opportunities for rich learning through the senses. Research on the use of sensory experiences suggests significant and long-lasting learning that contributes also to changes in children's feelings that lead to positive attitudes and behaviour towards nature and the environment.

So, how do we engage the senses? Sensory experiences can be gentle, subtle, funny, surprising, forceful or powerful. Try our strategy 'Cheeks and Tummies' in which children 'meet' trees and their surfaces, textures, temperatures and smells by placing cheeks and tummies against them. Children enjoy a sudden freedom in their responses to plants and 'interpret' for themselves – bamboo is described as being 'like metal'. Adults and children alike begin to laugh and smile: it is as if the emotional connection between people and plants is opened, renewed and rejuvenated by this simple gesture. Importantly, the connection is made between members of the group.

Feeling fear...

Fear can cause helplessness and apathy but let's consider how we can use fear to become stronger and braver. In plant landscapes there is potential for scary games, of playing hiding and exploring the wildwood – the scary forest where monsters lurk. In the IPFCG the most satisfying squeals and the shiniest eyes emerge from the bamboo wildwood! No wonder that the most popular play spaces in the IPFCG are those wild places, where children from about seven years head instinctively to challenge themselves to come out of the wildwood alive!

And awe...

Is there a connection between the sense of fear and another significant emotion elicited in the natural world – awe? Standing under the tree the children call Lady Loch, (an Algerian oak planted by a Lady Loch 116 years ago) is certainly awe-inspiring. Her branches and 'fingers' touch the earth and sweep her giant leaves about, enclosing you in her vast green cathedral. Being under her is to be transformed

'What is our objective as facilitators of emotional experience?'

Top: Misty Gorge at the IPFCH
Above: The Flax Tunnel at the IPFCH
PHOTOS: CHRISTINE JOY

through sensory immersion and heightened awareness to a new place, a new way of thinking, feeling and seeing.

Over-control?

Is there a point whereby we diminish the experience by over-control? Perhaps there is no real way of knowing without being able to measure the light in the learner's eyes. However, we can continue to ask ourselves the following questions:

- Do we trust visitors to direct their own discovery?
- Are learning experiences personal and open rather than directed or closed?
- How do we avoid over-control?
- Do we acknowledge that discovery can be emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual?
- How do we retain a compelling sense of mystery?
- What is the relationship between mystery, discovery and transformation?

When first considering interpretation options for the IPFCG we asked ourselves about the appropriateness of signage in a garden for children, a space for personal and open discovery rather than directed. We decided that we would have minimal signage. How would a sign impact on the child's need to feel that he/she is discovering the rainforest for the first time? Would they feel like an explorer arriving at a wilderness like the moon and seeing the US flag piercing the landscape in an aggressive gesture of ownership?

If a sense of agency and identity engenders a 'play of emotions', then what is our role in designing learning experiences that facilitate this?

- Can our visitors contribute to change e.g. through real gardening experiences?
- Can our visitors contribute to decision-making processes e.g. round-table decision-making?
- Do we engender a sense of belonging to place through learning experiences?
- How do we recognise/measure a sense of belonging?

People passion

'People passion' is one of the key design elements for learning experiences at the IPFCG. It acknowledges our connection to their interests. Research shows that adults who are actively engaged with and committed to caring for the environment have two main sources for their enthusiasm: positive experiences in rich natural environments as children, and family role models (or other significant adults) who demonstrated their respect for the environment (Chawla, 1999). We planned so that 'people passion' would be an active player in communicating delight (and therefore care and respect) in the plant landscapes and also in allied programming.

The power of story

Inspiration for the design team was supplied by memories of stories and the role landscape played in the literature of childhood. It seemed that there was a powerful link between literature and landscape, and between landscapes both real and imagined. Is it because of the powerful sensory immersion that rich plant landscapes provide? Or is it more complex in that the diverse and dramatic landscapes of our memories feed the imagination, feed the creative impulse?

The delight factor

Is the feeling a sense of wonder also driven by emotion to question and to understand something new, but perhaps not always to know all? With regards to the landscapes and experiences we provide for our children to play and learn in, shouldn't they be joyful, playful, and allow for the contribution of the imagination, the creation of stories that connect us to people and place, ones that we carry away with us in our hearts? They remind us, as educators, that the 'delight factor' is the most powerful teaching tool of all.

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Christine Joy is one of six designers of the award-winning Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden and Education Coordinator at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne
Email: Christine.Joy@rbq.vic.gov.au

Policy and practice:
challenges for interpretation in the heritage sector

Geoff Harrison and **Jaane Rowehl** report on the AHI and Tourism seminar Audience, Access and Conservation Plans: Working with the HLF, held February 2006

> 'Interpretation enriches our lives through engaging emotions, enhancing experiences and deepening understanding of people, places, events and objects from past and present'
>
> (AHI definition of interpretation)

The role of heritage interpretation may be changing. While the AHI definition of interpretation reveals a legacy of creativity and individuality, the reality is perhaps more sobering. Following the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) and the Department of Culture Media and Sport's (DCMS) recognition of heritage as a driver for social inclusion, democratisation and regeneration agendas, the pressure to deliver social, political and economic benefits now impact on many publicly funded interpretation projects.

A recent HLF statement underlines this ambition: 'Our view of heritage is a progressive and democratic one. Heritage is what people value and want to hand on to future generations. We believe that all sections of society are entitled to identify, care for and enjoy heritage.' (HLF 'Our Heritage, Our Future, Your Say' consultation document on the third strategic plan, 2006.)

This theme was explored at a conference, Audience, Access and Conservation Plans: Working with the HLF, held in February and organised by the Tourism Society and the AHI. In emphasising the democratic imperative and the need to find out *what* people value, a number of contributors underlined the importance of consultations. In addition, Karen Brookfield – Deputy Director (Policy and Research) for the HLF – highlighted the increasing significance of audience engagement and development in guiding HLF funding.

These themes are further emphasised by the recent promotion of the 'Public Value' agenda by various heritage-related bodies, as witnessed at the Capturing the Public Value of Heritage conference held in London in January (see also the recent Demos report entitled 'Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy: why culture needs a democratic mandate'). The conference was organised jointly by the HLF, English Heritage and the National Trust and included speeches from both Tessa Jowell MP (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport) and David Lammy MP (Minister for Culture). The ministers' contributions underlined the fact that 'Public Value' – defined simply as 'what the public value' – is now at the heart of heritage sector policy and funding strategies. Other papers presented at the conference summarised methods for potentially measuring and demonstrating Public Value as well as case studies of good practice in terms of projects and policy implementation. Again, many speakers placed a significant emphasis on consultations. In her keynote speech, Tessa Jowell asserted that:

'A public value world would include a lot more "co-production of services" at the local level. Instead of funding what we think is important, we'd start by asking people what's important to them and then thinking about how to protect it. In terms of heritage, that would mean asking the public which buildings and open spaces they value in their local area, and them allocating funding accordingly.

Am I describing a radical departure from the current way of doing things? Absolutely. But it's the only way to maintain our legitimacy and ensure our priorities are shared by the public.'

(Tessa Jowell MP, speech to the Capturing the Public Value of Heritage conference, London, January 2006, www.dcms.gov.uk)

As one might expect, the conferences highlighted many difficult issues and 'lively' debate followed many presentations. While few argued with the democratic principles inherent in public consultation, the events nevertheless raised a number of practical and philosophical questions for those involved in heritage interpretation.

For those involved with seeking funding for interpretation projects, there is perhaps a paradox in the relationship between audience development and 'Public Value'. On the one hand the HLF requires applicants to show how their project will, when implemented, proactively reach out to those people who would not normally engage with heritage. For interpreters, this means identifying and presenting stories and values that will, eventually, appeal to *new audiences* – those for whom the site currently holds little value. On the other hand, the Public Value agenda appears to emphasise the need to demonstrate existing, established values – values that are already held by a *democratic* majority of 'the public' (cf. the title of the Demos report).

This poses an inherent dilemma for heritage interpretation projects in the future. Should they seek funding by emphasising that it will enhance engagement, broadening the appeal of the site for existing users whilst also attracting new audiences? Or, should they seek funding by focusing on the values already placed on a site by many people ('the public') and thus emphasise that the project has a democratic mandate?

If the latter, could, for example, a small community group managing a historic Christian cemetery in an urban area with a large minority ethnic population secure funding for a development project even if the volume of local support was likely to be very limited due to the religious associations of the site? Would the Public Value imperative count against it, even if the project aimed to be fully inclusive?

This is an interesting time in the development of heritage policy. Nonetheless, to add to the long list of questions to which we have not yet found answers, maybe practitioners will need to consider the following when working in the present policy environment:

- Can minority interests in the heritage sector survive if values held by the (democratic) majority are prioritised?
- What is the role of heritage sector interpreters? Should they seek to create and enhance new, engaging values through interpretation or might they be required to emphasise only values that are already widely held?
- Might we just argue ourselves out of our jobs – what *is* the contribution to heritage interpretation made by interpreters?
- At what point can we say that we have consulted enough groups to reveal what 'the public' thinks?
- How do we *measure* 'Public Value'? – Who are 'the public'? What is 'value'?

We would very much like to hear your views on these questions. If you would like to make any comments please email them to:

geoff.harrison@plbltd.com or
jaane.rowehl@plbltd.com.

We hope to be able to collate these responses and possibly present them as a paper at the AHI conference in September when more discussion can take place.

Geoff Harrison and Jaane Rowehl are both Consultants with PLB Consulting Ltd.

It is a complicated business

Susan Cross feels strongly that good interpretation requires creativity as well as analysis. She wrote this poem for the AHI Conference to clarify her thoughts about what the interpretation business is about

It is a complicated business.
It's all about helping people to understand
where they are in the world
to appreciate the good bits
be inspired by natural beauty
and human endeavour
to be touched by suffering
to hear echoes and feel ghosts of what has gone before
and listen to the stories that places have to tell.

What we do gives people fragments
from which they begin to weave this cloak,
a fabric that connects and warms us all
helps us to see who we are, were, and could be.
This many-coloured coat, wraps around us.
We call it our culture.

Long ago there were storytellers.
We sat round the fire and listened to the tellers of tales
knowing that really everything
was even bigger than they said.
Words are doors, windows and mirrors
and people who craft them build our dwelling place
which is here – but it's there
Where? somewhere else – too.

The painter is part of the picture.
We all are collecting treasures
and talking them, turning them over and over,
trying to tell, to explain
why these are magic totems,
why you too should love them.
feel their power and beauty
because they are precious
and everything is shifting.

Susan Cross FAHI is director of TellTale
Email: susan@telltale.co.uk