Chapter Eight

Entering the 'Value of Heritage' Debate

This chapter addresses the third objective of the study, to contribute to the 'value of heritage debate', by assessing how concepts of visual repertoire and focussing impact on that debate. The debate itself is discussed in chapter four; it was always an intention of this study to look at the social use strands of the debate such as symbolic representation, legitimation of action and cultural identity. The study contributes to the debate in seven areas:

1. Rapid change of public focus on 'heritage' sites and monuments in the landscape.
2. Public awareness of multiple meanings of 'heritage' sites and monuments in the landscape.
3. The importance of detail in 'heritage' sites and monuments in the landscape.
4. The importance of day-to-day life in identity forming.
5. Flexibility of meaning for 'heritage' sites and monuments in the landscape that appear one-dimensional but are also available to evoke other meanings.
6. The implications of the prevalence of 'Cold War constructions' of Europe in people's understanding of 'heritage' sites and monuments in the landscape.
7. The importance of allowing people to work on their own 'self-narrative' or 'claiming' relationships with 'heritage' sites and monuments in the landscape.

1. Rapid Change of Public Focus on 'Heritage' Sites and Monuments in the Landscape.

The idea of visual repertoire discussed in chapter seven suggests that people hold pictures in their minds that they use to help understand the world around them. The idea of focusing activity when attached to visual repertoire allows a person to view the same landscape in a variety of ways depending on the context in which they find themselves. As the context under which a landscape is viewed changes focusing activity changes a person's view of the same image. Focusing allows that person to hold apparently conflicting opinions about a landscape or image within the same conversation. Focusing activity reconciles the contradiction, but not always, on some occasions a landscape becomes contested (e.g. Stonehenge as described by Bender 1998) through focusing activity.

The activity of focusing is an important issue for the management and conservation of sites and monuments in the landscape because it means that a person or group of people can change their attitude towards a particular landscape feature rapidly given a change in circumstances. The stabilising role of focusing slips to allow the same activity to politicise the observer and make the landscape contested. The results of such rapid changes in focus on a particular site or monument are illustrated by the case

of a former hospital chapel. This change in context can be found in the local newspapers in York in early 2000. In February 2000 a developer in York faced problems in using a site that they owned in the north of the city. The site had been acquired from an old hospital and included a derelict chapel. The local planning authority had requested, but not required, that the developer should make every effort to keep the building. The developer duly put the chapel on the market for sale or to let as a potential conversion into offices. The cost of converting the chapel for office use proved prohibitive and there were no acceptable offers. As a result the developer put in an application to the planning authority to demolish the chapel and build new offices.

It was at this point that the developer experienced difficulties and the case found its way onto the front page of the local newspaper on 17th February. Local residents objected to the application because, according to the newspaper, the chapel 'is central to their landscape' (York Evening Press, 17th February 2000). The newspaper interviewed a local resident who worked from home and whose office looked out at the chapel. The reporter emphasised that the interviewee's office 'looks out at the view'. Suddenly, when the threat of demolition loomed large, the context in which the locals viewed the chapel changed, it took on a sharp focus as if out of nowhere.

Both the references to landscape and view appeared in the opening paragraphs of the newspaper report, emphasising that the problem was with altering the visual landscape for local people. In an interview with the local councillor the report added to the visual importance of the chapel by supplying a detailed narrative that emphasised why the chapel was of particular local importance;

> "Joan Ellis, a parish councillor for the Clifton Without area, said the issue was a particularly emotional one for her as her father's memorial service was held at the chapel. Mrs Ellis said 'A lot of people around here worked at Clifton Hospital all their lives and they have very special memories'".
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> (York Evening Press, 17th February 2000)

In the extract above Mrs Ellis is adding her narrative to the debate, making her sharp focus very clear. The central theme of the argument for the local residents was that the chapel should be preserved because its presence in the landscape evoked special memories for those people who had similar memories to those of Mrs Ellis's. After the initial shock of the sudden local outcry about the chapel, the developers themselves seemed to have picked up on this role in the landscape as they offered a compromise by suggesting that the most visible aspect of the chapel be conserved, the tower. 'Mr Reeves (the developer's representative) said that he believed one of the main concerns about demolishing the building was because of the church tower and he said that the group hoped to incorporate the tower in any future development' (York Evening Press, 17th February 2000). It seems that the developer hoped that the tower could be used as a symbol for the whole chapel that would still provide a sharp focus to the local landscape for the indigenous people.

The change in context is of course an important factor in changing the role of focusing from stabilising

to subverting and creating a contested landscape. A 'heritage' site might be allowed to decay quietly without raising public complaint at all unless a change in context brings it into focus. This adds complexity to the 'value of heritage debate' as it suggests that social values can be masked or go unnoticed until there is a change in context.

The previous chapter has introduced two ideas about the ways in which people may understand the landscapes around them. These ideas of visual repertoire and focusing activity are observable when people talk about images visible to them. The idea of the visual repertoire as a resource when people talk, draws on ideas of stereotype (Lippmann 1922, Condor 1997) and repertoire (Potter and Wetherell 1987). The visual repertoire does not act directly as some kind of predetermined slide show in the head but is made up of a variety of commonly understood visual images that are commonly used in talk. These images are, at least in part, ordered for us by some 'rules' that we learn through our interaction with the culture in which we live, rules like those of perspective that tell us how a landscape should look. Potter and Wetherell's work on repertoire (1987) picks out issues about social representation (or verbal representation of visual representation), which have implications for the role of visual repertoire in our lives. This suggests that images may act as symbols in our visual repertoire but that these symbols may have different meanings according to the context in which we view them. For example the families in this study were asked to view the landscape represented in the images given them as local, British and European. Focusing activity allows people to change the meanings that they draw from the same landscape without appearing to contradict themselves. The action of focusing also draws on the idea of flexibility suggested by discourse analysis. Flexibility allows an individual to hold a single attitude or representation, possibly evoked by a landscape, but select a variety of resources from an available repertoire of images, or words, as the situation demands.

The idea of visual repertoire means that a particular landscape will have a multiplicity of meanings. Some of these meanings will relate to 'heritage' sites and monuments. Focusing activity masks the multiplicity of meanings when visual repertoire are referred to in a conversation allowing a person to hold different meanings in their talk about a landscape without appearing to contradict themselves. The change of focus can be very rapid and, when the context changes, can bring into focus landscape elements that may have lain unrecognised. Thus when the context is changed by a proposed development for example, it is possible for people to change from appearing entirely disinterested in a landscape feature to suddenly treating it as if it were the most important part of their environment.

2. Public Awareness of Multiple Meanings of 'Heritage' Sites and Monuments in the Landscape.

Focusing activity allows people to hold apparently conflicting attitudes without undermining their position in their discourse. Indeed the family groups participating in this study were able to draw upon this ability when they used images like that of Worcester Cathedral to evoke their local town, Britain or

Europe. This ability to reflect on facets of the landscape in different ways suggests that people are quite capable of dealing with multiple meanings for landscapes. This is supported by Macdonald's (1997) work about 'heritage' presentations on the Isle of Skye. In the *Aros* 'heritage' presentation a 'people's' theme, evoked a landscape in which Charles Stuart was an alien, quite different from the local inhabitants and unaware of the highland traditions of the poor crofter. Visitors to this *Aros* 'heritage' presentation were quite able and indeed interested in understanding the 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' story from different perspectives, using different foci. The clan 'heritage' centres on Skye however presented a very different approach to the same narrative. They presented a romanticised landscape in which the handsome prince was transported across the water on the 'bonnie boat' to a safe and familiar landscape on Skye. The 'traditional' visual repertoire and focus invited by the story and its landscape is much influenced by the romantic invention of highland tradition, commented on by Trevor-Roper (1983). A romantic tradition described by James MacPherson (who wrote the *Ossian* poems and then claimed that they were translated from an ancient highland 'Homeric' poem) and Sir Walter Scott and painted in romantic style by Victorian painters like Sir Edwin Landseer. The narrative in the Aros exhibition invites a change in focus and visitors apparently welcome this. (Macdonald 1997).

The complexity that multiple meaning brings to the 'value of heritage' should be seen as a positive attribute. The reflexive turn that has taken place in history and archaeology (Price 1979, Shanks and Tilley 1987, 1992) has been much criticised for its relativistic approach (Hobsbawm 1997) but nevertheless it has brought to the fore the possibility that there are multiple meanings to remains from the past. Ashworth terms this complex of meanings in the landscape *multilayering*, this he says is 'an almost universal condition for 'heritage': almost all 'heritage' is multilayered in the sense that places are endowed with different identities by different groups for different purposes in the same locations' (Ashworth 1998). Those involved in discussing the social value of 'heritage' should not underestimate the ability of the public to understand that there are alternative narratives to many landscapes, indeed in the local context people all have their own 'claiming' narratives associated with particular places.

3. The Importance of Detail in 'Heritage' Sites and Monuments in the Landscape.

Through the process of focusing observed in this study it becomes clear that detail can be a key element in the landscape. In a 'real' or physical landscape this refers to detail that might normally go unnoticed, for example gargoyles on a cathedral or things that are away from the usual gaze that require active looking for and discovery. A building in the landscape for example may be given more specific meanings by the detail that it contains. A timber-framed building might evoke anywhere in Europe but given enough details to focus on it will take on a national or local meaning. This does not mean that people are always walking around looking at detail, far from it, they usually rely on blurred visual repertoire to let them know where they are in the landscape, but when their context changes then detail becomes important.

This attention to detail is an important issue when considering the social 'value' of sites, monuments or other representations of the past. People who study sites or buildings analyse the detail and by bringing things into focus are able to make claims about the history of a particular place or feature of the landscape. Yet when the history or narrative of a place is related to the public the detail is often lost in the telling of the story. For example the leaflet available to visitors to the Iron Age Hill Fort at Castell Henllys in Pembrokeshire, South Wales interprets the site for them. The leaflet gives a thorough interpretation of the archaeology accompanied by plans, diagrams and reconstruction drawings. The detail from these interpretations is however, missing, which detaches the visitor from the evidence on which the leaflet is based. It is of course impossible to preserve *in situ* all of the archaeological evidence as excavation removes it from the ground, but more could be made of the evidence (the detail) and the interpretive process than is traditionally the case. Given the potential, but inconsistent importance of detail, it is suggested that places presented to the public through particular narratives allow public access to the details behind that narrative.

4. The Importance of Day-to-Day Life in Identity Forming.

This study has shown that day-to-day life carries a particular 'banal nationalist' reference, suggesting that certain activities define 'our' national way of life. At first glance this seems to be an issue related to images of shopping activity rather than the management of 'heritage' sites and monuments in the landscape. There are however, implications at two levels, first the connection with archaeological study that often concentrates on day-to-day life and second on the way that day-to-day life is presented to the public.

First there is a strong resonance between people's flagging of the importance of day-to-day life and the process of archaeology. Archaeology seeks to understand day-to-day life through the excavation of cultural remains or by recording standing buildings in detail. In both cases evidence of cultural activity, artefacts and use of space by past societies is presented to the public in terms of day-to-day life. Evidence for day-to-day life activity is very valuable in archaeological approaches to representing the past, the Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC) in York for example. The evidence from this study supports the approach taken at the ARC where the detail of archaeological evidence is emphasised, as are every day activities in the past.

A second consequence of the importance of day-to-day life to identity forming, reflects the 'banal nationalist' nature of this issue. The present study suggested that there is a particular 'banal nationalist flagging' associated with contemporary activities like shopping. This is a case of what 'we' do in the here and now. Representations of day-to-day life in the past are as Lowenthal (1985) put it representations of a 'foreign country'. This is the result, in part at least, of people comparing their contemporary day-to-day activity, that is vested with 'banal nationalist' referents to representations of

the way that ‘they’ lived ‘their’ lives in the past. The dislocation between contemporary life and the past highlighted by Lowenthal (1985) is a problem illustrated by this study. The readiness of people to use multiple meanings (discussed above) however, also suggests that this can be overcome by presenting people with alternative narratives and allowing people to reflect on their own day to day life as well as that of the past, without passing judgement on the ‘foreign’ way of doing things in the past.

5. Flexibility of Meaning for ‘Heritage’ Sites and Monuments in the Landscape that Appear one Dimensional but are also Available to Evoke other Meanings.

As this chapter has already indicated, there is a flexibility associated with landscape features that allows for multiple meanings. This is even true for landscape features that appeared at first to have strong nationalist connections. Timber framed buildings with their ‘chocolate box’ black and white beams appeared to be uncontroversial evocations of Britain or more specifically England. Yet those same images were also available as evocations of Europe too. This suggests that when a construction of Europe that is grounded in nationalist terms (a group of independent trading nations) is used, even strongly nationalist landscape features can evoke Europe. This kind of evocation of Europe is homogenous in that it suggests that timber framed buildings are part of the landscape throughout Europe. This approach to Europe can of course become divisive because it also suggests that places without such buildings are not really Europe.

The divisive nature of using particular landscape features to evoke a homogenous Europe is also illustrated by the response to Worcester cathedral. The cathedral was a universal reference point used to evoke Worcester, Britain (although no one in this study could actually agree on it) and Europe. For some the homogenous evocation of Europe by the cathedral was a matter of objective architecture, but lying behind many of the references to the cathedral was an evocation of Europe that drew on its purpose as a large house of Christian worship. This seems to hark back beyond the ‘high culture’ Europe of architectural appreciation to the medieval construction of Christendom which of course stood against Islam.

There is a very real problem here for the value of ‘heritage’ debate when it comes to closer engagement with Europe, especially if one sets about looking for representations of a homogeneous Europe in the landscape. The divisive nature of identity is never far away, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ of Cross and Crescent, the enlightenment empire builders and the barbarian, the western ‘free world’ and the communist ‘eastern bloc’ can all be transferred to the contemporary ‘fortress Europe’ or ‘new nationalism’. These reservations about using historic elements of the landscape as homogenising symbols for Europe have been highlighted in chapter three when considering earlier attempts by ‘heritage’ managers to represent a homogenous prehistoric European past.

English Heritage is currently engaged in a consultation process with the 'heritage management community' to develop policy towards the 'historic environment'. Working groups set up to represent the views of 'heritage' managers and academics have produced a set of discussion papers as part of the consultation process. In the first of these papers, 'Understanding' (2000), the working group has considered probable changes affecting the historic environment and has pointed to, amongst others, the influence of 'Europe'. The working group refer to a 'closer engagement with Europe' that will encourage changes in 'value systems'. They consider that aspects of the historic landscape will become more 'highly valued' because they have 'European aspects'. This could be interpreted as the cathedral in Worcester or the timber framed buildings. The working party state that; 'whereas in the past, both academically and politically, great weight has been placed on difference, in future similarities may be sought. This process is likely to extend further and become more deeply embedded in the way we see our world' (English Heritage Consultation Working Group 2000 Discussion Paper 1, 11). This statement suggests a continuation of earlier projects to find homogenous historical representations of Europe from the past as 'origin myths' the Neolithic revolution and 'Farmers our Ancestors' (Zvelebil 1996), the Bronze Age 'Golden age of Europe' (Rowlands 1987, Kristiansen 1996) and the Celtic Empire suggested by the *'I Celti'* exhibition (Collis 1996). Rather than stemming from a 'Cold War' construction of Europe as a nation of nations however, the statement appears to relate to a 'fortress Europe' constructed on a homogenous 'heritage' but risking 'inter-category heterogenisation' and making others of 'value systems' that exist outside the world of liberal western democracy.

6. The Implications of the Prevalence of 'Cold War Constructions' of Europe in People's Understanding of 'Heritage' Sites and Monuments in the Landscape.

Where the 'value of heritage' debate turns toward Europe to provide symbols of unity the visual repertoire plays a key role. The meanings of these representations of Europe however, need to be studied carefully lest they prove divisive. Most of the references to Europe and its evocation through the Worcester landscape drawn from this study tend towards a 'Cold War' construction of Europe. It seems that understandings of Europe are still couched in visual repertoire that suggest a Europe of nations, connected by trading interests under an institution that has constructed itself as a nation, wrapped in a flag, with its own passport, central political legislature based in northern Europe and legitimised by 'high culture' and 'cities of culture'. The construction of Europe as one of regions is not suggested amongst the English in Worcester at least, a medieval Europe of Christendom is suggested through some approaches to the cathedral. 'Fortress Europe' is suggested by the same evocations as 'Cold War' Europe. In the case of 'fortress Europe' the 'other' that always stands opposite 'us' has changed to become Islam and the 'third world' rather than the communist world. This suggestion of the 'other' was not detected in the study so it is not possible to differentiate between 'Cold War' and 'fortress Europe constructions.

Clearly the 'Cold War' construction of Europe is oriented towards northern Europe. The imagery of the landscapes in which European Union institutions stand is northern European, predominantly Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg City. The images evoked by some of the family focus groups of a civic town-square and timber-framed buildings with people bustling about their business, also suggests a northern European landscape (typified by image 9 in this study). Even the choice of a German composer's work as a European anthem adds an aural sense to the visual repertoire for Europe as a northern European construction.

A northern European visual repertoire evoking Europe has interesting implications for post 'Cold War' Europe and the understanding of its landscape. With the reunification of Germany and the 'rediscovery' of central Europe, this northern European image may actually develop. The same kinds of evocation may be found in the landscapes of the cities of central Europe like Prague. If, as the English Heritage working party on the historic environment states, 'European perspectives are likely to become increasingly valued' (English Heritage Consultation Working Group 2000 Discussion Paper 1, 11), it may be the landscape of the medieval town that stands at the fore. This would carry with it both a sense of independent citizenship, which Delanty hopes might reconstruct a non divisive Europe (1995), and the symbolism of the medieval church that stood against, and later tried to convert, the Islamic world and 'third world' respectively.

7. The Importance of Allowing People to Work on Their own 'Self-Narrative' or 'Claiming' Relationships with 'Heritage' Sites and Monuments in the Landscape.

The 'value of heritage' debate is at its most active when dealing with local issues, causing a proliferation of local regeneration projects based on 'heritage' sites and monuments or museums. At the local level the process of 'claiming' or 'self-narrative' has an important part to play in the development of personal and communal self-identity. Where sites or monuments in the landscape are over managed, taken into care, conserved and then removed from local use to be tourist sites they may also be taken out of the local landscape. If a historic landscape feature is no longer available for the generation of local 'claiming' narratives, it takes on new meanings. The nuraghe studied by Odermatt, for example, were protected from local access and became places of national importance for the gaze of tourists. Local people no longer interacted with their historic environment. Visitors and Tourists simply came to see a national treasure. The simple local activities like holding picnics at the site were lost and along with them the positive place-identity created by on going 'claiming' activity.

When sites or monuments are developed as 'heritage' presentations or are conserved with minimal or no 'heritage' presentation, their local roles in the landscape need to be taken into account, both as places of local activity and as part of local 'claiming' narratives. Recognition of the multiple meaning of sites and monuments should be encouraged, for example any evocation of homogenous Europe

should also reflect local experiences too. The presentation or conservation of ‘heritage’ must pay attention to both the ‘official’ interpretation of the value of the site and the variety of local meanings and ‘claiming’ narratives that are likely to exist. If too many local ‘claiming’ narratives are over turned of course, by changing the context of a site (even by conserving it) focus may change rapidly and local resistance may result.

This chapter has considered the implications that ‘visual repertoire’, focusing and ‘claiming narrative’ have for the ‘value of heritage’ debate. These visual understandings of the landscape can remain unnoticed for years, underpinning senses like nationalism in a ‘banal’ way. But they can also become politicised by a change in context and a slip in focus to become contested landscapes. These moments are particularly shocking for the establishment who seek the stability of ‘commonsense thinking’ and visual repertoire. Detail is important because it is the subject of focus, this has important consequences for presenting ‘heritage’ in the landscape. Day-to-day life is a particularly important detail for those wishing to present ‘heritage’ to the public as indeed are the multiple meanings of such sites.

On a more global level visual repertoire still living evoke ‘cold war’ constructions of Europe. There are many problems with trying to develop new repertoire for Europe, a process beset by the divisive nature of identities associated with ‘us’ and ‘them’. It seems that as Delanty (1995) and Ashworth (1998) suggest the answer may lie in a Europe of great cities rather than racial and religious conflict.

Lastly switching from the global to the local the study has also highlighted the importance of allowing people the space to build their own relationships with ‘heritage’ through ‘self narrative’ and ‘claiming’. In other words making the local landscape their own.