

Chapter Nine

Concluding Views on the Study

This concluding chapter provides an assessment of how the study met the objectives set out in the introduction:

1. To investigate some of the ways in which people understand standing 'heritage' buildings and structures as symbols within the environment or landscape around them. In particular this research explores people's visual understanding of 'heritage' structures in the landscape.
2. To gain insight into some of the roles that the understanding of 'heritage' structures in the landscape play in the negotiation of identity. The objective in this case is to look specifically at local, national and European identities.
3. To contribute to the 'value of heritage' debate current amongst archaeologists and 'heritage' managers.

This chapter also provides a summary of the thesis that is central to the study, namely visual repertoire and focusing activity.

Visual Repertoire, Focusing and People's Understanding of 'Heritage' in the Landscape.

This study has discussed the results of investigating ways in which people understand the landscape around them. The resulting thesis has developed the idea of visual repertoire and focussing activity. Visual repertoire stem from ideas of stereotyping (Lippmann 1922, Condor 1997). They are 'pictures in the head' that people carry with them and which they use to make sense of the world. Visual repertoires are culturally constructed phenomena that rely on our own experience of the world and images that are presented to us. This means that the way that we see such images are structured by social constructions of art and aesthetics that apply particularly to landscapes (Brett 1996). Visual repertoires are relatively static constructions because they are not regularly questioned, being used as what Michael Billig (1987 and 1991) terms 'common sense' thinking as a series of commonly held cultural values.

The data collected for this study demonstrated the use of visual repertoire but also showed that people can work with images in a more dynamic manner. This more dynamic understanding of visual experiences like the landscape takes the form of an activity that I have termed focusing activity. Through focusing landscape features can be looked at in different ways to give different meanings depending on context. To avoid the appearance of taking contradictory positions, people focus on different aspects of the landscape or their visual repertoire to assign different meaning in different contexts. A person can focus clearly on a feature, or set of features, in the landscape and compare it to their visual repertoire. They can also blur parts, or the entire mental image to allow it to take on different meanings. By this three-fold process, an apparently fixed set of visual repertoire can have many meanings. Alternatively an individual or group might focus sharply on a single feature with

special meaning to an individual or group. I have called these three focusing activities: *core focusing*, *blurred focusing* and *sharp focusing*.

Core focusing is an activity by which an image being discussed or viewed is matched easily to a person's visual repertoire. Blurred focusing takes place when a landscape or image being talked about or viewed appears to fit too many or none of the images held in a person's visual repertoire. When this happens the image might be ignored or the image is blurred to fit the person's visual repertoire. There are two ways of using blurred focusing. The first is by simply invoking the 'it could be anywhere' rule. The second way of using blurred focus occurs when the term 'it could be anywhere' is qualified by adding some definition. In the case of the family focus groups this was generally 'it could be anywhere in Europe' or 'it could be anywhere in Britain'. This second kind of blurred focus activity is more specific and fits enough parts of a person's visual repertoire to characterise a landscape that is too large to be wholly perceived by any one person such as a global concept like a nation or Europe.

Particular details can be brought into sharp focus by demonstrating specialist knowledge or particular experience. This kind of sharp focusing activity picks out particular features. These may not be features that one looks at on an everyday basis, but they do become important when trying to establish or claim local identity. This relates to Urry's idea of the gaze. A person's sense of the local highlights details that might not be noticed by a visitor, e.g. small details like the cupolas on the buildings on Worcester High Street. These are not the kind of detail that a visitor might hold within their visual repertoire and thus they may not be sought out. This suggests that visitors may see what they expect to see (Urry 1992) whilst locals know the places that the 'tourist gaze' does not alight and picks them out for sharp focusing to claim them as local features. It is unlikely of course that people spend all their time noticing special details about their own local landscape. This very specific form of focusing may be encouraged when confronted with a visitor's gaze on the same landscape.

Visual Repertoire and focusing clearly form an important part of people's interaction with the landscape and 'heritage' structures located in them. Objective two of the study took the investigation further by seeking to gain insight into how such understanding of the landscape might affect senses of national, European or local identity.

Visual Repertoire, Focusing and Identity (National, European and Local)

The concept of visual repertoire has a close relationship with Michael Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism' (1995). Billig describes 'banal nationalism' as a collection of ideological habits and beliefs that keep the nation state self aware and ready to show more fervent nationalism when threatened (1995). Visual repertoire also act in a banal manner, amongst them are things like flags fluttering above government buildings that are also banal nationalist referents. As banal phenomena and ideological habits visual repertoire are particularly important as symbols of nationalism but also underpin certain constructions of Europe. Drawing on the data collected for this study people's commonly held social constructions of Europe seem to lag behind the times with regard to Europe, they

present a 'cold war' Europe, with divisive 'us' and 'them' undertones. Local identities also draw upon visual repertoire but also draw upon focusing to identify particular details that form part of 'self-narratives' (Sarbin 1983), which were identified in action in this study as 'claiming activity'. 'Claiming activity' is the telling of narratives that relate a person to local landscapes or features that give them a special relationship through personal experience.

Focusing activity brings dynamism to the banality of visual repertoire. The ability to focus on the core of a landscape, special sharp focused detail or blur images act in two ways. On the one hand focusing allows for the negotiation of identities in the landscape, people can adjust and smooth over their positions in regard to multiple meanings in the landscape without challenging their 'common sense' thinking. Bender finds the process of identity negotiation problematic (1998, 97), because as with the case of focusing, negotiation simply smoothes over any possibility of people really confronting conflicts between multiple meanings in the landscape. Focusing can however, switch easily and seamlessly away from this negotiation role by sharp focusing on particular details in the landscape in particular contexts to make a landscape contested. This contested landscape has been seen focused on 'heritage' sites on many occasions; Stonehenge (battle of the beanfield), Rose theatre in London (actors lying down in front of the bulldozers), Queens Hotel in York (public outrage at developers destroying Roman bath house remains) or on a smaller scale a former hospital chapel under threat on the outskirts of York. In all of these sudden 'sharp focus' contestations of 'heritage' in the landscape the establishment was shocked at an apparent change in public value of particular landscape features or even buried remains. It is the subtle change in focusing activity, brought on by a change in context, that suddenly make 'banal' landscapes hotly contested.

Taking the Social Value of 'Heritage' Debate Forward.

The ideas of visual repertoire, focusing and claiming activity have implications for those who manage, conserve and present buildings, sites and monuments in the landscape to the public. Chapter eight considered the implications in detail for particular aspects of the 'value of heritage' debate. How can these implications feed into developments in this debate?

The current consultation process being carried out by English Heritage has renewed the 'value of heritage' debate. The consultation working group has considered a wide range of issues concerning the historic environment currently published in the Internet as five discussion papers called 'Understanding', 'Belonging', 'Caring', 'Enriching' and 'Experiencing' (2000). Running through the papers is the 'value' theme.

At the same time as reassessing 'value' the group has also assessed the 'heritage' itself, preferring to use the term 'historic environment' instead. The avoidance of the word 'heritage' is a key issue in this document as it acknowledges the problems with the definition of this term as highlighted in chapter four of this study. The working group avoided the term because 'heritage' can be 'seen as exclusive and beyond challenge' which they feel is a 'negative connotation' (English Heritage Consultation

Working Group 2000 Discussion Paper 1, 9). This issue was clearly a point of debate amongst members of the group. The discussion document implies that the term might become acceptable if 'the collection of things making up 'heritage' comes across as more democratic and open, and when local and multicultural perspectives become part of it, 'heritage' will become less excluding'. The working party also commented however, that 'we are perhaps still some way from reaching a consensus, or even a readiness, to see 'heritage' as multifaceted' (English Heritage Consultation Working Group 2000 Discussion Paper 1, 9). The working group also highlighted a change in the legislative approach to the historic environment as contained in two planning policy guidance notes published by the government in 1990 (PPG16) and 1994 (PPG15). Both guidance notes emphasised the importance of the historic environment as a 'living space'. The guidance notes state that this understanding of it the historic landscape as 'living space' has a crucial role to play in 'shaping the future, contributing to our sense of cultural identity, and reinforcing a sense of place and local and regional identities' (English Heritage Consultation Working Group 2000 Discussion Paper 1, 6) The working group emphasise the PPGs as milestones in the recognition of increasing concern for local communities and pressure groups to determine the future in their own localities. It is these concerns that have dragged the 'value of heritage' debate away from simple 'value for money' considerations to debates about values vested in contemporary views of cultural significance. The working group calls for a better understanding of how such views might be formed and how they can be forged into workable strategies.

It is through studies like the one carried out for this thesis that a better understanding of the cultural significance of the historic landscape can be formed. This study has suggested that there are a multiplicity of meanings ascribed to sites and monuments in the landscape, some of these are held as communal or popular visual repertoire but are still open to rapid changes of attitude when the viewer's context or focus changes. The underlying constructs, held in part as visual repertoire are of course still there, these may be positives especially as local 'claiming' narratives but can also act as 'banal nationalist' flags or represent particular constructions of Europe. Some of these social constructions are negative, the divisive construction of Europe for example or indeed overtly racist at a local level, as this study demonstrates in chapter eight.

An important contribution that this study makes to the current debate about value, and how to understand contrasting views of the historic environment is through the research methods used. Surveys have been used extensively by researchers in museums and the 'heritage' industry to define their markets but only rarely have people been allowed to speak for themselves. A qualitative approach allows people to do just this; it releases the people taking part in the research from the constraints of specified questions with pre-defined answers to say openly what they want to. When it comes to understanding how views of cultural significance are formed this has to be the way forward.