Heritage and hermeneutics: towards a broader interpretation of interpretation

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This article re-examines the theoretical basis for environmental and heritage interpretation in tourist settings in the light of hermeneutic philosophy. It notes that the pioneering vision of heritage interpretation formulated by Freeman Tilden envisaged a broadly educational, ethically informed and transformative art. By contrast, current cognitive psychological attempts to reduce interpretation to the monological transmission of information, targeting universal but individuated cognitive structures, are found to be wanting. Despite growing signs of diversity, this information processing approach to interpretation remains dominant. The article then presents the alternative paradigm of hermeneutics through the works of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer, to provide a broader interpretation of interpretation. This not only captures the essence of Tilden's definition but construes heritage interpretation as a more inclusive, culturally situated, critically reflexive and dialogical practice.

Keywords: environmental interpretation; heritage tourism; hermeneutics; Gadamer; Heidegger; Tilden

Introduction

Tourists visiting a national park or historic site will typically encounter visitor information centres, signage, visual displays, tour guides, park rangers or curators, whose purpose is to "interpret" the heritage values of a place or its artefacts. The question of what is actually meant by "interpretation" in the context of environmental and heritage tourism continues to be raised and contested. Amongst the plethora of definitions in journals and practical manuals, the six principles of Freeman Tilden (1957/1977), outlined in his classic text, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, have had an enduring influence. Increasingly, however, researchers and practitioners are seeking to reformulate and extend Tilden's principles in terms of contemporary theoretical frameworks and circumstances. Recent endeavours have made reference to phenomenology (Knapp & Yang, 2004; Seamon, 1983, 1991), grounded theory (Knapp & Poff, 2001), symbolic interactionism (Archer & Wearing, 2003), semiotics (Hodge & D'souza, 1994), discourse analysis (Waterton, Smith, & Campbell, 2006), social constructionism (Uzzell, 1998), experiential theories of place (Stewart & Kirby, 1998), critical theory (Jamal & Everett, 2004) and postcolonialism (Staiff, Bushell, & Kennedy, 2002). The dominant framework, however, appears to be a cognitive psychological approach to

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communication theory (Ajzen, 1992; Beeton, Weiler, & Ham, 2005; Ham, 1983, 1992; Loomis, 1996; Orams, 1995; Youngentob & Hostetler, 2003) usually characterized by information processing models.

This article considers the possible contribution to heritage interpretation in tourist settings of another theoretical approach, *hermeneutics* (the "theory of interpretation"): a long-standing tradition of interdisciplinary inquiry concerning the nature of interpretation in literary criticism, philosophy, philology, history and social theory (Bauman, 1992; Crotty, 1998; Palmer, 1969). Hermeneutics covers a heterogeneous body of theory and research that has been largely over-looked by heritage and environmental interpreters. Exceptions to this can be found in the work of Mugerauer (1995) on the built environment, Hooper-Greenhill (1999) on museums and Aldridge (1989) and Chen (2003) on the natural environment, but these do not seem to have influenced the interpretation profession in any substantial way. This may well change with what appears to be a growing literature on "experiential approaches" that foster a "sense of place" in heritage tourism (Stewart, Hayward, Devlin, & Kirby, 1998, p. 264; Stewart & Kirby, 1998). Hermeneutical theorists are sometimes referred to in passing (Massey, 2005, p. 12; Tilley, 1994, p. 12) in experiential studies. As Stewart and Kirby (1998, pp. 36–37) point out, however, most of these studies tend to emphasize the uniqueness of experience and setting rather than the interpretive processes which underpin these experiences of place. We propose that hermeneutics can meet this need and provide a theoretical framework generally supportive of these diverse accounts.

The neglect of hermeneutics is understandable given the relative absence of European social science perspectives in the founding of heritage interpretation in the United States in the early twentieth century and the belated translation of key hermeneutical texts into English in the 1970s. Over the past four decades, however, hermeneutics has emerged from relative marginality in Anglo-American scholarship to being a significant framework for research in diverse areas such as administration and management (Kress, 1995; Mercier, 1994; Noorderhaven, 2000; Prasad, 2002), consumer research (Arnold & Fischer, 1994), information systems (Boland, 1991; Chalmers, 2004; Myers, 1995), psychology (Martin & Sugarman, 2001; McMillan, 1999; Messer, 1988; Packer, 1985; Rommetveit, 1991; Widdershoven, 1999), communication studies (Arthos, 2000; Deetz, 1978; Radford, 2002; Stewart, 1992) and tourism research (Arcodia, 2005; Tribe, 2001).

The main purpose of this article is to bring the hermeneutic tradition into conversation with the theory and practice of *heritage interpretation* as formulated by Freeman Tilden and subsequent interpreters. In Tilden's (1977) view, *heritage* interpretation aimed to disclose the significance of both natural and historico-cultural sites to contemporary visitors. This implicitly challenges a long-standing dualism in Western thought that radically separates nature from culture. Not all of Tilden's successors have maintained his holistic conception, preferring instead the narrower term of *environmental interpretation*, with its stronger emphasis on the natural environment (Beckman, 1991; Ham, 1992; Lewis, 1981; Sharpe, 1976; Youngentob & Hostetler, 2003). However, Tilden's rejection of the nature–culture binary through adopting an inclusive notion of heritage can be coherently and productively grounded in a hermeneutic framework, wherein nature is shown to be always already interpreted through cultural mediation. As we will show, this is particularly evident in the work of Gadamer (1977, 1989), whose notion of "tradition", as the ongoing symbolically mediated and mediating source of meaning, provides a way of understanding both natural and built sites (or artefacts) as cultural heritage. Consequently, *heritage tourism* is understood in this article to embrace the activities of those who visit both historical and natural sites to experience their culturally mediated significance.

Over the past 30 years, heritage interpretation has been the subject of concerted attempts to re-frame it in terms of the categories of cognitive psychology (Ham, 1983; Hammitt, 1981; Prince, 1981), particularly as it pertains to communication (Ajzen, 1992; Ham, 1992, p. 3, 2002, p. 9). Much of the literature influenced by this approach assumes that the basic meaning of "interpretation" is settled. It follows, therefore, that tour guides, rangers, curators and other interpretive staff can move on to the more practical and technical aspects of communicating the heritage value of particular sites or artefact to visitors. Some scholars, however, have raised serious doubts as to whether this provides an adequate account of what heritage interpretation is about. David Uzzell (1998, p. 12), for example, asserts that "interpretation is . . . stuck in a rut where the how has become more important than the why". More fundamentally, Uzzell (1998, p. 12) and Staiff et al. (2002, p. 98) express concerns about the epistemological grounds and "content" of interpretation, especially its emphasis on an objectivist, Western scientific paradigm (which underpins cognitive models).

Hermeneutics by contrast, particularly the work of Heidegger and Gadamer, disputes the monopolistic claims to truth of scientific objectivism by questioning the universal applicability of its subject–object dualism to all forms of understanding. While hermeneutics is not a refutation of the findings of cognitive psychology, its differing perspective allows for a reconsideration of the latter's problematic assumptions and their consequences in interpretive practice. In particular, we suggest that a predominantly cognitivist approach risks reducing Tilden's rich and transformative conception of interpretation to the unilateral presentation of "information", which Tilden explicitly sought to avoid. Consequently, it is argued that hermeneutics can provide a framework for recapturing and extending Tilden's broader vision of interpretation. This broader formulation also questions the current asymmetry in the interpreter–visitor relationship; pointing towards a more inclusive, culturally situated, critically reflexive and dialogical model of heritage interpretation.

The discussion firstly outlines the genealogy of heritage interpretation and the increasing influence of cognitive psychological models and assumptions from the late 1970s onwards. It then elucidates some of the main insights and principles of hermeneutics. The latter is explicated by highlighting four seminal thinkers, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer, who are broadly representative (but by no means exhaustive) of the diverse hermeneutic tradition (Palmer, 1969). In this selection a distinction is made between the "traditional hermeneutics" of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, with their focus on epistemological issues, and the "philosophical hermeneutics" of Heidegger and Gadamer, with their ontological concerns about the nature of the interpreter and interpretive community (Guignon, 2002, p. 265). Both of these perspectives are then employed to address current concerns in heritage interpretation. Against its critics, we also demonstrate that philosophical hermeneutics provides the basis for both a pluralistic (Guignon, 2002, p. 266) and critical (Prasad, 2002, p. 23) approach to interpretation. That is, it allows for a multiplicity of truthful interpretations but nevertheless critically evaluates all such accounts in a model of continuous dialogue that refuses subjectivist relativism.

Hermeneutics is a "broad church", and were a comprehensive account possible it would also include a discussion of the distinct but interrelated perspectives of Habermas's (1987) critical theory, Foucault's "interpretive analytics" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983), Derrida's "radical hermeneutics" of deconstruction (Caputo & Martinez, 1997) and Ricoeur's (1974) hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval. We do not have space to do these other critical perspectives justice but would encourage others to draw upon them in enriching heritage interpretation. Indeed, as we have indicated this process of diversification has already begun. We simply aim to clarify the advantages of some of the key insights of the hermeneutic tradition for contemporary heritage interpretation. Accordingly, the

main insights of the four selected thinkers are related back to Tilden's principles of interpretation with a view to rehabilitating and re-working some of the latter's neglected dimensions. In effect this points beyond Tilden to the wider discussions about interpretation taking place in other disciplines but consistent with Tilden's basic intention of establishing heritage interpretation as a broadly educational, ethically informed and transformative art. In short, this article revisits the epistemological and ontological bases for heritage interpretation with a view to broadening its theoretical framework in the "holistic" (Archer & Wearing, 2003, p. 6; Wearing, Archer, & Jackson, 2003), "experiential" (Stewart & Kirby, 1998, p. 36) and "critical" (Uzzell, 1998, p. 16) directions that a number of interpretive researchers have advocated.

Heritage interpretation: a genealogy

The modern practices of heritage tourism interpretation originate from the early conservation movement that began in the United States in the nineteenth century. Its initial inspiration and concerns are reflected in the nature writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), Henry Thoreau (1817–1862) and John Muir (1838–1914), which influenced the "nature study" movement in American education. A disciple of Muir's, Enos Mills (1870–1922) is credited as the first environmental interpreter (Brochu & Merriman, 2002a; Civitarese, Legg, & Zueffle, 1997; Fazio, 1975). Mills published the first book on nature guiding and campaigned widely to establish the National Park Service in the United States. His writings stress the need for direct immersion of the visitor in the natural environment to awaken a sense of wonderment; leading to deeper understanding. The aim of nature guiding was "to illuminate and reveal the alluring world outdoors" (Mills, 1920, p. 130). Clearly what Mills had in mind was an art rather than a science, interpretation rather than analysis. It was an outdoors alternative to what Mills deemed the "bookish" traditions of formal learning in schools and museums. Part of the guide's role was to be *inter alia* "an interpreter of [the sciences of] geology, botany, zoology and natural history" (Mills, 1920, p. 130) but in a way that formed a compelling narrative about the visitor's environment; that ". . . appeals to the imagination and reason, gives flesh and blood to cold facts, makes life stories of inanimate objects" (Mills, 1920, p. 126).

As Brochu and Merriman (2002a: 12) point out, the principle that interpretation is not simply information, the recitation of facts, is preserved in Freeman Tilden's (1884–1980) highly influential text *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1957/1977). In Tilden's oft-cited definition, interpretation is

> an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media rather than simply to communicate factual information. Interpretation is revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact. (Tilden, 1977, p. 8)

Tilden (1977, p. 9) expands this preliminary definition by elaborating six principles of environmental interpretation. These hold that interpretation (1) must relate what is displayed to the experience of the visitor; (2) is revelation rather than information; (3) is a teachable art; (4) provokes rather than instructs; (5) relates parts to an underlying whole and that (6) children will need a qualitatively different interpretive approach from adults. These principles were never posited as immutable laws or methods yet it is a testament to Tilden's erudition that they remain fundamental in interpretive program manuals and texts (Brochu & Merriman, 2002b; Ham, 1992; Pond, 1993; Sharpe, 1976).

As already noted, Tilden also expanded the referents for interpretation to include both the natural and built environments within his broad notion of heritage. More than this, Tilden's view of interpretation is inseparable from an ethically informed conservation practice, encapsulated in the dictum: "through interpretation, understanding; through under-standing, appreciation; through appreciation, protection" (Tilden, 1977, p. 38). In Tilden's view, interpretation is not simply about cognition but is a fundamentally transformative *praxis* in which visitors come to re-experience nature or history in a holistic manner. At its most ambitious, the interpretive experience leads the heritage visitor towards a new relationship with nature or history. The ethic which drives interpretation according to Tilden (1977, p. 90) is "love" in the sense of care for the thing interpreted and the people who come to experience it. As will be demonstrated shortly, this view is more consonant with contemporary hermeneutics than a cognitive, information processing model. Such affinity is not surprising given that Tilden was heavily influenced by Emerson's Transcendentalist philosophy, which has its roots (via English Romanticism) in the same German Idealist philosophy that gave rise to hermeneutics (Mitchell, 2005). However, in upholding the extra-cognitive dimensions of interpretation, modern hermeneutics also provides a counter-weight to purely arbitrary subjectivism.

Over the past half-century, with the growth of urbanization, the tourist industry, national parks and heritage sites, the need for conserving, managing and communicating environmental values has led to various attempts to reformulate and expand on Tilden's interpretive principles. Some, like the pioneer of British Interpretation, Don Aldridge (1972, pp. 307–308, 1989, p. 65), have stressed that interpretation is the art of explaining the conservation values of a place to the public, without prescribing what they should think. Both Aldridge (1989) and Uzzell (1998) also emphasize the potential of heritage interpretation to "present alternative scenarios for the future direction of society" (Uzzell, 1998, p. 16), challenging people to think about the sort of world in which they wish to live. In this view interpretation is a critical educational practice based on care for the environment (Stewart et al., 1998, p. 264), in which the visitor's agency and potential wisdom are respected. This broad, artis-tic, value-driven and transformative vision is extended by interpretive scholars like Beck and Cable (2002) who attribute the qualities of revelation, "gift" and "hope" to environ-mental and heritage interpretation.

On the other hand, with the institutionalization and commodification of National Parks as tourist sites, the potential of interpretation as a "management tool" for controlling visitor behaviour has also been advocated (Beckman, 1988, p. 14; Field & Wagar, 1973; Ham, 2002; Hooper & Weiss, 1991; Sharpe, 1976), and the instrumental or technical means for getting an environmental message across have been increasingly emphasized. In this context, interpretation comes to be viewed as something that managers plan and present *to* people, rather than something that people might actively make *for* themselves or *with* others (Uzzell, 1998, p. 18). Unfortunately, in this sort of managerial or guide-centred model, visitors come to be seen as relatively passive. Such institutional practices favour the use of monosemic and instrumental types of interpretive theory, including those provided by marketing, consu-mer research and cognitive psychology, and an exclusive emphasis on these risks engendering manipulation rather than understanding (Archer & Wearing, 2003, p. 6; Uzzell, 1998, p. 17).

Cognitive psychology and information processing in heritage interpretation

Since the 1970s, there have been highly successful attempts to ground heritage interpretation within a predominantly scientific theoretical framework derived primarily from cognitive psychology (DART, 1978; Ham, 1983; Hammitt, 1981, 1984; Kaplan, 1978), particularly

as it pertains to communication studies (Ajzen, 1992; Borun & Massey, 1990; Dick, McKee, & Wagar, 1974; Fazio & Gilbert, 2000; Ham, 1992, 2002; Jacobson, McDuff, & Monroe, 2006; Jensen, 2006; Kuo, 2002; Lackey, 2002; Lackey & Ham, 2003; Littlefair, 2003; Loomis, 1996; Prince, 1981; Roggenbuck, 1992; Sanders, 1987; Wechtunyagul, 2007; Youngentob & Hostetler, 2003). Cognitive-inspired studies appear to have been introduced initially as part of a move to "evaluate" the effectiveness of interpretation programs for resource management purposes (McCool & Stankey, 2003; Stewart & Kirby, 1998, p. 33). However, as the categories employed by evaluative researchers were "fed back" into interpretive programs and planning, the theory and practice of interpretation have been re-shaped accordingly (Ham, 1983, 1992; Hammitt, 1981, 1984; Prince, 1981). Prominent strands of cognitive psychological theory applied to interpretation in tourist settings include cognitive map theory (DART, 1978; Hammitt, 1981; Kaplan, 1978; Knopf, 1981; Orams, 1995), cognitive dissonance theory (Orams, 1995), the elaboration likelihood model of communication (Lackey, 2002; Petty, McMichael, & Brennon, 1992), the theory of reasoned action (Bright, Manfredo, Fishbein, & Bath, 1993; Ham & Krumpe, 1996; Manfredo & Bright, 1991), the theory of persuasive communication (Roggenbuck & Berrier, 1982) and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1992; Beeton et al., 2005; Hendricks, 2000; Jensen, 2006; Roggenbuck, 1992).

Cognitive psychology addresses the way humans obtain, retain and process information (Ham, 1983, p. 12) as discrete and representable units of meaning. In keeping with earlier behaviourism it assumes that human individuals act in response to external stimuli but posits that these responses are mediated through cognitive models: mental constructs, representations or beliefs systems of the mind, which may be conscious or unconscious (Widdershoven, 1999). The locus of meaning in this approach resides in each individual's mental constructs which are deemed to correspond with objects, whose representatives they are "within the mind" (Phillips, 1999, p. 259). This approach, therefore, tends to restrict interpretation to the operations of individual cognition.

According to Radford (1994), psychology, in both its behaviourist and cognitivist versions, has dominated communication studies since its inception. The dominant framework originated in Shannon and Weaver's (1949, pp. 33–34) cybernetic theory of communication, which psychologists took up in the 1950s. This model delineates the ways in which a *message* or meanings are transmitted, from a *sender* (*transmitter*) via a *medium* to a *receiver* in a unilateral fashion (Ajzen, 1992; Ham, 2002; Lackey, 2002; Lackey & Ham, 2003; Manfredo & Bright, 1991; Morgan & Welton, 1994; Prince, 1981). When communication is reduced in this fashion to cognitive information processing, then defining interpretation as a sub-set, "method" or "approach to communication" (Ham, 1992, p. 3, 2002, p. 9) preserves this reductionism in subsequent analyses.

The applications of information processing models in heritage interpretation typically involve measuring the extent to which a message is effectively lodged in the mind of the recipients and its persuasiveness with regard to behavioural outcomes (Ajzen, 1992; Armstrong & Weiler, 2003; Beeton et al., 2005; Cable, Knudson, Udd, & Stewart, 1987; Kool, 1986; Youngentob & Hostetler, 2003). While there has been acknowledgement in more recent studies on the way that receivers "elaborate" upon the meanings received (notably Ajzen, 1992), the emphasis is still on bringing the visitors' beliefs and behaviour into accord with the site management's view with maximum efficiency before an interpretation can be regarded as "successful" (Armstrong & Weiler, 2003; Beeton et al., 2005; Ham, 2004; Hendricks, 2000; Roggenbuck, 1992; Youngentob & Hostetler, 2003).

Cognitive models of information processing (focusing upon sender–message/medium–receiver–elaboration and/or feedback) underpin much research, training and

evaluation carried out by academics working in the field of heritage and environmental interpretation, but it is debatable whether all interpretive practitioners consciously or primarily subscribe to these. The situation on the ground is undoubtedly more eclectic and multi-faceted. Nevertheless, the model's assumptions emphasizing the effectiveness of message retention and obtaining behavioural compliance remain pervasive regardless of whether it is explicitly utilized or not (e.g., Bitgood, 2000; Borun & Miller, 1980; Bright, 1994; Cole, Hammond, & McCool, 1997; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Kool, 1986).

In recent times, the orthodox cognitivist paradigm in heritage interpretation has been challenged from within psychology by those (notably Uzzell, 1998) committed to social constructionist and socio-cultural approaches. As Stewart and Kirby (1998, p. 36) have noted there has also been a promising shift towards what they characterized as "experiential" approaches to heritage interpretation, involving recognition of the mutli-sensory, affective, kinesthetic and actively "mindful" (as distinct from cognitive) dimensions of interpretation (e.g., Moscardo, 1999, pp. 75–78). This has led to a greater appreciation of the subjective processes involved in the visitors making meanings for themselves, particularly in the work of McIntosh and Prentice (1999). However, the significant theoretical implications of these innovative studies do not appear to have been fully appreciated as yet by the profession or those researchers committed to the dominant cognitive psychological model. Furthermore, these accounts while providing a much more satisfactory account of the tourist's interpretive agency do not yet sufficiently address the interplay of agency and culture. It may be that hermeneutics provides the possibility of a multi-perspectival and multi-disciplinary holistic framework to underpin these newer approaches.

In the preceding critique, there is no question that cognitive psychology demonstrates valid findings; however, the portrayal of interpretation as a function of information processing by individuals is unnecessarily reductionist and instrumental in heritage tourist contexts. It takes a special case of communicative interaction and treats it as the whole in the service of agency-centred managerial practices. Further, cognitive psychology makes assumptions about the nature of communication, meaning and human reality that are questionable from a hermeneutic standpoint.

The hermeneutic tradition: major thinkers and insights

The word hermeneutics derives from the ancient Greek *herméneuein*, which means "to interpret" or "to understand". It has the same root as the name of the Greek God *Hermes*, the messenger of divine truth to the limited comprehension of mortals. In classical philosophy it refers variously to the expressing, explaining and translation of meaning, to making the unfamiliar familiar or intelligible (Palmer, 1969, pp. 12–14). Modern hermeneutics grew out of the interpretation of texts, particularly religious texts (Crotty, 1998, pp. 87–88). However since the German Enlightenment, it has been extended to all spheres of human enquiry whereby meaning is seen not as something to be calculated and represented but rather as something to be explicated and extended.

The first of the four thinkers to be considered here is Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), a philosopher and theologian, involved in debates about the methodology of philological, juridical and biblical interpretation. Credited with being the first modern philosopher to propose a general theory of interpretation, Schleiermacher (1838/1998, p. 3) defined hermeneutics as "the art of understanding", with a particular emphasis on understanding "the ... discourse of another person correctly". While concerned with textual analysis, his principles can be generalized to other areas of human knowledge. Unlike some previous interpreters, Schleiermacher did not believe that the meanings

of things we encounter in the world are self-evident. On the contrary, texts and objects require an active effort on the part of an interpreter to recover or "make sense" of their meaning and worth. Interpretation is not simply a matter of conveying an already transparent understanding to where there is none but also of unraveling misunderstanding, rectifying error and actively constituting a coherent meaning. Studying the meaning of a text, for example, requires giving weight to both the "objective" rules of grammar and the most likely "subjective" meanings of the original author in their historical context. Given that these procedures involve the interplay of both objective and subjective assessments, Schleiermacher claimed interpretation is necessarily an art and not a science. This artistic quality of interpretation, however, which Tilden (1977, p. 9) also advocates in his third principle of interpretation, does not preclude rigour or the application of teachable principles.

The basic interpretive principle for Schleiermacher was that any *particular* thing we may wish to understand "can only be understood from out of the whole" (Schleiermacher, 1998, p. 27) of which it forms a part. This leads him to posit the circular character of human understanding: "knowledge is always in an apparent circle, that each particular can only be understood via the general". In turn, "the understanding of the whole is . . . conditioned by that of the particular" (Schleiermacher, 1998, p. 231). This principle, known as the "hermeneutic circle", formulated in the early 1800s is reiterated in the fifth of Tilden's six principles: "interpretation should aim to present the whole rather than a part. . ." (Tilden, 1977, p. 9). Taking an example from botany, the isolated leaves of a tree would hold limited botanical meaning without knowledge of their important role (photosynthesis and cellular respiration) for the whole plant of which they form a part. The tree, in turn, becomes more meaningful within a forest habitat or wider ecosystem that includes human beings.

Schleiermacher (1998, p. 5) also makes an important distinction between *interpretation*, which aims to understand the meaning of something (hermeneutical understanding), and *communication* or *rhetoric*, which aims to present that understanding to others in a persuasive manner. Interestingly, Schleiermacher's idea of communication (in so far as he deals with *communication* and not *interpretation*) is similar to contemporary cognitive-based theories of communication. It relies on the successful, unilateral presentation of one's ideas to another person or group through an effective communicative medium, such as a speech or text. This also emphasizes the authority of the author or "sender" rather than the "receiver" in establishing meaning (Rundell, 1998). It presupposes a largely monological form of communication, such as one finds in advertising and public relations, where the meaning is controlled to produce a particular outcome rather than relying on the interpretive capacity of the audience or any interaction with the sender. This entails an asymmetric power relation in which the receiver is expected to bring themselves into conformity with the sender's authoritative message. Given that Schleiermacher was concerned with Biblical and juridical interpretation in an authoritarian Protestant society, his emphasis on the authority of the author/sender is understandable. Whether this is desirable or even effective in a contemporary tourist context is a question that interpreters need to take seriously when developing programs.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), the second of the thinkers considered, was a nineteenth-century psychologist and historian who wanted to turn Schleiermacher's art of interpretation into a science. He believed interpretation was essential not only for understanding texts but for understanding the human world in general. Consequently, Dilthey (1976) expanded Schleiermacher's application of the "hermeneutic circle" to incorporate the broadest historical and cultural contexts. Interpretation for Dilthey was the process

of questioning the meaning of the thing to be interpreted (e.g., a tree, forest, historic site, rare species or artefact) in relation to its broader contexts (e.g., history, world or environment).

An example of Dilthey's circular conceptualization of interpretation, relevant to environmental interpreters, can be illustrated by how we might go about understanding a tree. This can be done in a range of contexts. For example, we could begin by asking about the tree's biological or botanical classification. This involves moving conceptually away from that particular tree to the wider body of arboreal knowledge which forms part of the context of both the tree and the interpreter. It might be identified as *Eucalyptus Papuana Aperreriñja* (Brooker, 2000), commonly known as a "ghost gum". This term, derived from a broader classificatory system, gives the interpreter information to expand both their own and their audiences' understanding of the particular tree in question. Another context in relation to this particular tree might be historical, or even political. It may be that this tree was the heritage-listed "Tree of Knowledge" at Barcaldine in Queensland under which 3000 defeated strikers were said to have gathered in 1891 to form the Australian Labour Party. This tree made headlines in May 2006 when it was poisoned by vandals on the occasion of the passing of new industrial relations laws by a then conservative Australian Government, restricting the activities of trade unions and collective bargaining rights (Lagan, 2006). In both instances, interpretation is effected by referring the particular to a more general context and then relating this back to the particular.

The process of interpretation outlined by Dilthey can be seen to operate on two levels (Lee Martin, 2002; Rundell, 1998). First is the level of mutually shared knowledge that most adults within a society already hold about things through a common language, such as the knowledge to name trees, rocks, people, places, etc. Dilthey calls this common stock of descriptive knowledge (facts), *elementary understanding*. It is only by raising questions about gaps, possible connections or contradictions in our elementary understanding that we move to the second level of *interpretive understanding* by traversing the hermeneutic circle (Rundell, 1998). Dilthey's distinction of levels is analogous to that found between factual "information" and interpretation in Tilden's (1977, pp. 9, 18–25) second principle. Interpretation for Tilden always "includes information", but much like Dilthey's elementary understanding, this is only a preliminary step towards interpretation. In both cases, the point of interpretation is the "revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact" (Tilden, 1977, p. 8). This search for the larger truth is essentially a hermeneutical exercise, in which the interpreter moves constantly from the interpreted to its broader contexts and back again. In this sense, any interpretation is always ongoing, incomplete and "partial". There are always more questions that can be asked of any site or experience.

While Schleiermacher and Dilthey envisaged interpretation as a *methodology* for the humanities, later hermeneutic philosophers such as Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1989) rethink interpretation as underpinning all forms of understanding, including natural science. That is, they see interpretation as *ontological*, as fundamental to being human. Science, methodologies and research techniques are conceived as arising upon this "primordial" capacity to interpret. By starting with our interpretive capacity rather than its referents, these philosophers also undercut the nature–culture binary referred to above, which can unnecessarily limit and distort our understanding of heritage.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), proposed that "interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something" (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 191–192). The world (both natural and cultural) is always already pre-interpreted as we reflect upon it. Through being socialized in a particular culture and language, we already have a

"fore-structure" of innumerable background understandings, practical dispositions, habits and tacit skills for recognizing and negotiating the things we encounter in everyday life (Heidegger, 1962, p. 191). Consequently, we normally experience things, whether natural or cultural things, as "something" and rather than "nothing" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 189). We do not normally need to analyze the separate properties of things we encounter in daily life to understand them. We do not, for example, piece together the separate properties of "green", "leafy", "tall", "wooden trunk" and conclude "Ah ha, it must be a tree!" Recognition, based on a multitude of prior experiences with trees, is instantaneous. The various meanings we give to things, such as trees, will reflect our past experiences, expectations and the place accorded to those things in our culture and its practices. This is how the hermeneutic circle is extended by Heidegger to everyday life, orbiting between the particular thing we may wish to interpret and the myriad of background social practices, habits, routines and experiences. Theoretical or scientific thought also emerges out of this background but is not our most common mode of thinking, nor is it necessarily the best for dealing with the problems of life.

According to Heidegger, scientific rationality is powerful but entails metaphysical assumptions that are potentially distorting. Foremost amongst these is subject/object dualism (Heidegger, 1962, p. 87, 1984, p. 132). This is the idea that we humans go about all inquiry as rational, knowing "subjects", confronting the world as a set of separate "objects" that are not part of our subjectivity (consciousness). In short, for the purposes of scientific or theoretical understanding we pretend that we are world-less beings or beings without a context. Furthermore, the world (as objects) confronts us initially as something unknown but nevertheless available for our inspection and potential manipulation. Heidegger wants us to see through the contrivances of this view and consider objective rationality as a derivative and intermittent special purpose form of knowledge.

Following Heidegger, Jurgen Habermas (1987) has argued that we only need this analytical-empirical type of knowledge in relation to matters requiring technical control. It follows that we must be extremely careful of its application to questions of meaning and values, including the meaning and worth of our natural environment and cultural heritage. While scientific knowledge explains causal relationships or correlations, it cannot of itself make value judgements or give ultimate meaning to our lives in the universe. The latter requires other forms of understanding. There are, for Heidegger, other forms of "truth" besides scientific truth that have a valid role in interpretation.

Heidegger (1977) wants us to de-centre the over-privileged and, thus, lop-sided position we have given scientific (particularly "technological") rationality in our Western culture. This is not because rationality is wrong but because the exclusivity attached to its truth-claims as "the only valid form" of knowledge can seriously distort our understanding of the world. Heidegger wants us to recall other important ways of understanding and experiencing the world that stem from the fact that we are already "in the world" prior to our conceptual understanding of things. Truth, for Heidegger, is not simply the correspondence between statements and objects (as in analytical-empirical epistemology), or the correspondence between internal mental constructs and an external environment (as in cognitive psychology) (Phillips, 1999). Rather, truth is an experience or process that involves unconcealing what was previously concealed. It is, in short, revelation (*entbergen*). Science is also a mode of revelation but presupposes other more fundamental layers of meaning attributed to things or places, including our pre- or sub-cognitive practical understandings. Indeed, Heidegger says that it is these implicit and shared background practices that make things intelligible and available to science for empirical testing in the first place (Heidegger, 1962, p. 122). Interpretation therefore involves placing what we wish to interpret in the

context of these shared background understandings to reveal connections that had previously been hidden or forgotten. Tilden (1977, pp. 9, 18) makes this same point in his second and fourth principles respectively when he says, "interpretation is revelation" and "interpretation is not instruction, but provocation".

Heidegger further suggests that we reveal other kinds of truth through art (Heidegger, 1971, pp. 36, 56–56, 67–72), meditative thought (Heidegger, 1971, p. 181), moral reflection (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 344–346) and attentiveness to moods and feelings or what today might be called "emotional intelligence". This accords with Tilden's advice in his fifth principle that interpretation must address "the whole man [or woman] rather than any phase". The recent psychological work on "affect" in heritage interpretation (Orams, 1995; Webb, 2000) promises a broadening of older cognitive framework and may partially confirm Heidegger. However, attempting to explain affective experiences in terms of an individual's "mental" structures (if not a contradiction in terms) offers no self-evident advantage as a basis for interpretation over the dynamic involvement of one's whole being (mind, body and emotions) in shared cultural practices. Living in a world of multiple contexts and change, the human way of being in the light of Heidegger appears multi-layered and dynamic in its interpretive possibilities.

Another mode of interpretation for Heidegger (1977, p. 12) that enables us to relate, reveal and provoke significant truths about our environment but resists all logical closure, measurement or control is the poetic (including poetry, lyric narrative and song). This is remarkably consistent with Tilden (1977, p. 27), who says the "interpreter must use art, and at best he [or she] will be somewhat of a poet". Poetry, for Heidegger (1977, pp. 3–35; 2000), is a way of letting language reveal to us the possibilities of all sorts of tacitly understood things and their connections. Consider the following poem, *Municipal Tree*, by one of Australia's great Indigenous poets, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1990), and the sorts of truth it may reveal.

Municipal Gum[1]

Gumtree in the city street,
Hard bitumen around your feet,
Rather you should be
In the cool world of leafy forest halls
And wild bird calls
Here you seems to me
Like that poor cart-horse
Castrated, broken, a thing wronged,
Strapped and buckled, its hell prolonged,
Whose hung head and listless mien express
Its hopelessness.
Municipal gum, it is dolorous
To see you thus
Set in your black grass of bitumen—
O fellow citizen,
What have they done to us?

The truth of this poem is not objective but neither is it purely subjective; rather it resides in its provocation to make something significant out of a range of possible meanings that culture makes available. Heidegger (2000) reminds us that the truth of poetic interpretation

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is not found in factual correctness but its capacity for revelation in particular contexts. The gum tree here, is a thing out of place "in the city street" and "a thing wronged". In another time and place (perhaps the creation dreaming of Noonuccal's people) and certainly prior to European colonization, it would have stood strong and potent (not "castrated") in "the cool world of leafy forest halls". One may be tempted to see a metaphoric parallel here between the fate of this tree and that of Noonuccal's people. The current political context will invariably intrude on most Australian readings of this poem and what it has to say about non-Indigenous society's mis-treatment of nature and Indigenous people. Despite brevity, the associations and emotional resonances of word, rhyme and image are too numerous to list here. Poetry, like art, speaks expansively to a different level of being than the purely cognitive, especially in those cultures that value the poetic in daily life (Gordon, 2000).

Heidegger's arguments about the diverse interpretive capacities of human beings have much to offer for heritage interpreters. They point to the importance of valuing other ways of understanding or experiencing truth that are more basic or "primal" than scientific explanation (and not simply as embellishment or technique). Tilden (1977, pp. 9, 47–54) was particularly aware in formulating his sixth principle that children, who have not yet developed abstract analytical skills, need to be addressed by qualitatively different educational programs than those offered to adults. Interpreters, therefore, need to be mindful of the revelatory, truth-disclosing capacities in myth, folklore, narrative, art, poetry and play in addition to science. While interpretive centres may not be suitable for poetry readings, many have utilized story telling (Pastorelli, 2004) and even theatrical performance (Dierking, 1998, p. 62) for both children and adults as part of their interpretive programs. American environmental educator, Susan Strauss in *The Passionate Fact* (1996) provides an exemplary account of how story telling as an interactive, literary, visual and auditory experience speaks powerfully to both the "head" and "heart" in her on-site performances. The revival of nature writing as a popular genre (both in fiction and non-fiction) also attests to the different forms of engagement the public is seeking with the natural environment and cultural heritage (Sharp, 2005, p. 358). It may be our greatest mistake to think of interpretation, primarily as a cognitive event (Heidegger, 1971, p. 112).

The final thinker dealt with here is Heidegger's student Hans George Gadamer (1900–2003), who extends the former's insights about how our pre-understandings of shared background practices (rather than mental maps) facilitate interpretation with his notions of "cultural tradition", "prejudice" and communication as conversation leading to a "fusion of horizons".

Gadamer's work demonstrates the unavoidably social character of the interpretive circle. Not in the sense that we never cogitate alone but rather that all interpretation takes place within an ongoing history, language and inter-subjective context: what Gadamer calls a cultural "tradition". We all inhabit such traditions and are inhabited by them (Gadamer, 1989, p. 358). In this view, nature and natural objects are not things we encounter apart from, or prior to, culture. These too are mediated through cultural traditions, which we explicate and transform through language in our ongoing social interactions, narratives and conversations as heritage. The source of meaning, therefore, in any heritage interpretation resides primarily in cultural traditions and their transformation; not the individual's head. If tradition is the source of meaning it also follows that meaning cannot be "inherent in" the object of interpretation, contrary to the American National Association for Interpretation's (2000) and National Park Service's (2003) definition of interpretation. This is why the "same" artefact or site can have very different meanings to different groups of people.

The primacy of cultural tradition in providing meaning is evident in the way many North Americans identify the opposite of the urban environment with "the wilderness" (Mugerauer, 1995; Zimmerman, 1992), whereas a Briton may talk about "the countryside" (Aldridge, 1975; Grace, 1996), a non-Indigenous Australian may refer to "the bush" or "outback" (Seddon, 1997; Sharp, 2005) and an Indigenous Australian to "country" (Zeppel, Muloin, & Higginbottom, 2003). These terms, wilderness, countryside, bush and country, are neither transparent descriptions nor (despite some similarities) synonyms. Each term signifies a "sense of place" within the preconceived meanings and practices of ever changing and interweaving traditions. Such traditions do not have to be "national", homogenous, static or mutually exclusive, for Gadamer (1990, p. 288), but they are what connect people and places; making both intelligible across time. While people share traditions, no single understanding contains all aspects of a tradition. We all have a limited "horizon of understanding" or "range of vision . . . from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 143).

In Gadamer's view, language and tradition "pre-form" our experience of places and things before we ever encounter a professional interpreter. Thus, when Tilden (1977, pp. 9, 11–17) advises in his first principle that interpretation must "relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor", interpreters need to be mindful of the social dimensions of that experience. That is, how personal experience has already been shaped by language and socio-historical tradition. Another word for the unexamined preconceptions of tradition, which have shaped past experience and through which we tend to read new experiences of our environment, is "prejudice". Gadamer, however, does not accept the traditionally negative view of prejudice as necessarily hindering understanding. Prejudices can be distorting but they can also provide a vantage point enabling our understanding (Gadamer, 1989, p. 143). Such prejudgments or pre-understandings are the starting point of any interpretation because they provide the means for us to identify and question the things we encounter. When we encounter something we do not understand, our preconceptions are challenged to change in order that we might understand (Arnold & Fischer, 1994, p. 57).

All visitors will bring prejudices to a heritage site. In visiting a forest, a timber-worker or builder may see the trees primarily as an untapped resource. An environmental scientist may see the same trees as vital components of regional bio-diversity in need of conservation. A recreational tourist may experience trees mainly for their aesthetic value or feel that they provide an environment in which to relax and recuperate from a stressful life-style. For the Indigenous Australian visitor, partaking in a non-Western tradition, the trees may be sacred or part of the story of that country, with a spiritual significance that may elude non-Indigenous understandings. These divergent attitudes to the natural environment can cause or reflect conflict in the wider society. In the context of a heritage site, however, there emerges the possibility for a dialogue or conversation across differing positions and reflection upon one's own position. This in turn may lead to a change that attempts to address or overcome the conflicts and disparities of power in the wider society (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). The recognition of Indigenous land ownership that has occurred at Uluru (formerly Ayers Rock) and Kakadu National Parks (De Lacy, 1994; Weaver, 1991) in Australia, where many Indigenous inhabitants now conduct interpretation, fosters and perhaps anticipates further developments in this regard. Dialogue facilitates but cannot guarantee positive changes in the relations between different peoples and places.

Interpretation, for Gadamer (1989, p. 362), commences with the raising of questions about the thing to be interpreted. It proceeds by way of communication as it does for

cognitive psychology but communication is modelled on conversation and not the unilateral transmission of a message. In communication as conversation or dialogue, the roles of "sender" and "receiver" become fluid and reciprocal. There will be an exchange of preconceptions, signs and stories. This will only happen, of course, if both parties are prepared to listen and understand a horizon that is not theirs (Gadamer, 1989, p. 347). This means participants allowing their ideas and feelings about something to be put to the test, allowing others to read and question them in the light of their experience and contexts. In a genuine dialogue we also have to be prepared to admit that another understanding may be right and that our own has to change. We in turn will question the other's understandings from our horizon and they may shift their understanding as a result. No participant holds all the wisdom in a conversation, although some may have more information at their disposal than others. The understanding reached through dialogue is not one of imposed agreement but conviction arising from the to-and-fro interplay of participant's contributions. Ideally, dialogue opens up the possibility of ongoing learning, mutual correction and change.

Interpretation, therefore, is a function of communication as conversation and the traditions within, against and between which conversation takes place. In dialogue, we communicate not only with those who may be physically present but we also mobilize the preconceptions of cultural traditions about a site or artefact and bring them to bear on present questions. In this cross-over of present and past conceptions, Gadamer (1989, pp. 273, 374) says, lies the possibility of a "fusion of horizons" in which understanding shifts and the participants change. It may be that a person visits a National Park in a developed country with only an economic or aesthetic view of its value but in conversation with others, encounters views drawn from biology about bio-diversity and the fragility of the ecosystem. Perhaps they will begin to see the forests in a new light and start to review their previous beliefs, feelings and actions. It may also be the case that visitors to a pristine forest site in the developing world need to be made aware of the economic deprivation of the local inhabitants and that conservation is unlikely to be successful without local support and hence some sort of economic upliftment program instituted (Boo, 1990). This is unlikely if views about heritage are simply imposed by a professional interpreter from the dominant cultural or social group and no active participation or reflection by others is encouraged.

The professional interpreter, like the visitor, also stands amid cultural tradition and brings prejudgments to their work. Typically, this is a tradition of conservation and revelation, of which there are many variants. Aldridge (1989, pp. 67–73), after a brief historical survey of Western philosophy, identified 26 different conservation ideas that continue to influence conservation practice today. In most contemporary heritage contexts, the interpretive tradition will be informed by science but also by other cultural practices that need to be articulated. So, rather than suppressing prejudices in interpreting something, Gadamer advises anyone seeking understanding to make their prejudices explicit and be prepared to have them examined by others. This requires that the professional interpreter be "reflexive" in explicitly identifying to themselves and their visitors, the tradition(s) in which they as interpreters and the site (these may not be the same) stand and how values and predispositions form part of the interpretation.

Reflexivity about oneself and tradition has implications for the education of professional interpreters. It means that in addition to scientific literacy and technical know-how, interpretive staff need to be aware of the diverse and continuing cultural, historical, literary and artistic aspects of tradition that feed into wider public's views of heritage and "sense of place" off-site. This is perhaps most obvious with historical heritage sites. However, the arts and historical work addressing nature are increasingly popular

(Sharp, 2005) and this is reflected in the growing academic field of "ecological humanities" (Rose & Robin, 2004). These arts foster traditions that professional interpreters and interpretive institutions would benefit from engaging with. Those working in National Parks and forest settings in Australia, for example, would be well served in reading the works of literary naturalists like George Seddon (1997), Tim Flannery (2002) and Ashley Hay (2002). Works of fiction relating to particular regions, like Richard Flanagan's *Death of a River Guide* (1994) on Tasmania or Murray Bails' *Eucalyptus* (2002) on western New South Wales, and cinematic works, such as Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Mt Diogenes) or Rachel Perkins' *One Night the Moon* filmed in the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, can likewise be instructive for heritage interpreters in those areas. These works are not science but they enrich the language and tradition through which their audiences connect with the natural environment and express their concerns. Furthermore, they give interpreters access to the sorts of popular pre-understandings visitors will bring with them to particular heritage sites.

It may be that there is not just one cultural tradition encompassing a particular site. Indigenous cultures, despite the devastation of colonialism, are insistently reclaiming their voices in many contemporary heritage settings (Dyer, Aberdeen, & Schuler, 2003; Graham, 1999; Rose, 2000). This raises serious questions for re-negotiating interpretation and at the very least acknowledging that a number of interpretations "belonging in parallel" (Read, 2000, p. 223) are possible. Jane James' (1999) description of interpretative planning at the former Umeewarra Mission site at Port Augusta in South Australia provides a positive model of how both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stories might be told without the latter (a product of the colonizing culture) simply appropriating the former. K. Anne Ketz (2006, p. 80) drawing upon her experience in a Native American context suggests that optimally, as a result of a "process of dialogue and collaborative consultation" with sufficient respect, goodwill and mutual agreement, it may even be possible to produce an "interwoven" account of multiple voices. An account that is inclusive and does not gloss over the harsh realities of past or present has much to offer but such an outcome cannot be presumed in advance of the dialogue.

It is also the case that even in situations where Western cultures are dominant that there are always competing streams or contested interpretations within the "same" tradition calling for recognition. This is important for Gadamer because critics such as Apel (1984) and Habermas (1990) have charged that hermeneutics' reliance upon tradition renders it insufficiently critical of the status quo and that any critique must come from elsewhere. In response Gadamer (1990, p. 288) argued that "tradition" is not a prisoner to the past but "exists only in constantly becoming other than it is"; pointing to a dynamic, self-monitoring and creative notion of tradition. In this view, hermeneutics is a genuinely "critical perspective" capable of questioning and changing the dominant interpretation of places and things precisely because traditions already contain within themselves the moral resources for critique and renewal (Prasad, 2002, p. 23). These resources can be retrieved and extended through ongoing interpretive and re-interpretive practices. The philosopher Charles Taylor (1993) supports Gadamer's view, arguing that any historical tradition always contains a variety of "internal goods" that have been lost or covered over. A hermeneutic retrieval, therefore, has the potential to "transcend all our practices such that we are capable of transforming or even repudiating some practices in the name of these goods" (Taylor, 1993, p. 355).

An example of hermeneutic retrievals transforming tradition from within can be found in the interpretive practices of the Ngarinyin people in the Kimberley region of north-western Australia. In 1987, the Indigenous community of the Kimberley's with

some government funding revived the traditional practice of re-painting rock art (albeit with modern paints) which is central to their interpretation of "country" and the passing on of this knowledge to future generations (Truscott, 2003). This practice was criticized by some heritage experts at the time as damaging to the existing images and funding was withdrawn. However, the interpretation of country continues through an innovative movement in which Ngarinyin artists have adapted their paintings onto the non-traditional canvass medium as a way of teaching their young about country and extending their heritage to new audiences (Roberts, 2005). This latter aspect represents a major shift on the part of the Ngarinyin elders who condoned the movement because many of the images now shown in galleries were considered *Mamaa* or "untouchable" and so traditionally forbidden to outsiders (EINAR, 2007). Hermeneutics in this broader view is intrinsically bound up with the ongoing re-telling and critically reflexive interchange of the diverse stories that shape and reform our identity and heritage.

Gadamer's stress on the culturally situated, dialogic and critically reflexive character of interpretation complements contemporary social learning theories in education. Dierking (1998, pp. 58–61) lists these approaches and cites numerous studies of social interaction in informal learning settings where dialogical interpretation is apparent. Two major approaches that have been explicitly linked to hermeneutics are social constructivism (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. 4) and situated socio-cultural theories of learning (Burbules, 1993; Burbules & Bruce, 2001). Some cognitive psychologists have also embraced ideas from these approaches. The recent application of such ideas in heritage interpretation, particularly in museums, is welcome [e.g., Hein (1999) on "constructivism" and Koran, Willems, and Camp (2000) on "situated cognition"]. However, while these applications break with the uniform cognitive processing model of interpretation, they also represent two competing explanations (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

Gadamer's hermeneutics by contrast may help reconcile the contradictory tendencies of social constructivism and situated socio-cultural perspectives on learning. On the one hand, Gadamer stresses the active participation, through dialogue and self-reflection, of multiple participants that is essential to interpretation. In this sense, we do construct meaning with others and multiple interpretations are possible. On the other, Gadamer insists that the evolving cultural traditions, in which we are socially and linguistically situated, condition and limit the range of plausible interpretations. In other words, a tree may be simultaneously a resource to a timber merchant and a sacred site to an Indigenous Australian but it is not a submarine. There is no viable tradition or interpretive community that will sustain such a fancy. In this respect Gadamer plots a course for interpretation that avoids the extremes of both objectivist reductionism and subjectivist relativism.

Attempting to broaden heritage interpretation in the direction suggested by Gadamer's hermeneutics would have significant implications. Firstly, as a number of commentators have suggested (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; Uzzell, 1998, p. 19), interpretation would have to be re-conceptualized as a task that belongs equally to visitors as it does to the interpretive specialist. Interpretive audiences would have to be viewed as the professional interpreter's collaborators and dialogue partners. All participants would be seen as potential interpreters. In this context, providing space for a dialogue between the interpretive guide and diverse groups of visitors (such as those from various class, gender, age, religious, ethnic and national backgrounds) is essential in heritage tourist settings.

The second major implication for a hermeneutic approach to heritage interpretation would be in regard to the role of the professional interpreter. The interpretive guide cannot and should not attempt to completely control or impose the meanings, which the audience take away with them. However, they do have a responsibility to take a stand on the

significance of the site and encourage visitors to reflect on their own relationship to ecological or heritage values as an ongoing concern. In order to optimize learning in guided tours, the official interpreter is indispensable as an informed, resource person and moderator of discussion. In this regard, as Christie and Mason (2003) outline, the interpreter can become a "critically reflective practitioner" in a process of educational and ethical transformation. The interpreter or guide after all is best placed to initiate dialogue by raising stimulating questions, keep the discussion open by encouraging a diversity of views and moving conversation forward when participants can only "agree to disagree" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 270). They will also need the humility to listen carefully and admit the limitations of their knowledge. The dialogue does not have to cease when the visitor leaves the site. If the visitor is able to take away interpretive insights, brochures, booklets, invitations to follow-up activities and references to other sources, then the conversation continues by other means.

A final word may be added here regarding the changing media and technologies of heritage tourism. Some operators and agencies have shifted from traditional curatorial practices to "edu-tainment" in their interpretive programs. What is important from a hermeneutic perspective is not the presence of entertainment per se but whether or not such practices activate a visitor's negotiation of the hermeneutic circle. As Veverka (2000) says, the educational component of heritage tourism is its defining feature but this should never be sterile or didactic. Gadamer's (1989, p. 92) work supports this view when he suggests that "play" has a legitimate role in interpretation because it allows participants to suspend self-consciousness and imaginatively give themselves over to the activity they may be involved in. Such involvement, according to Gadamer, has no object other than itself for the players and yet its estrangement from "the real" can enable learning and change. A "spectacularly successful" (Sunter, 2003) example of this might be found in the *Blood on the Southern Cross*, a computerized sound and light show that the Sovereign Hill museum employs for the interpretation of the Eureka rebellion of 1854 at Ballarat in central Victoria. What is decisive, therefore, is not the media but whether such things as simulations, shows or role playing facilitate a meaningful rather than trivial traversing of the hermeneutic circle for the heritage visitor.

Conclusion

This article began by noting that despite some emerging signs of diversity, the dominant framework underpinning much recent heritage interpretation in tourist settings has been drawn from cognitive psychology. It questioned the limitations of this framework, particularly its emphasis on universal but individuated cognitive structures and information processing models of communication for grounding environmental and heritage interpretation. In contrast to the breadth of Tilden's vision, the cognitive model appears unnecessarily reductionist and instrumental. As an alternative, we argued that the relatively neglected paradigm of hermeneutics has the potential to reinvigorate Tilden's holistic, ethically informed and transformative art of heritage interpretation, developing it in new directions. In support of this argument we reviewed the works of four influential hermeneutic philosophers and noted their affinities with Tilden's aim and principles. We found that the hermeneutic tradition not only sustains Tilden's major claims concerning the nature of interpretation but offers a coherent framework for furthering heritage interpretation as a broadly inclusive, culturally situated, dialogical and critically reflexive art. Furthermore, it is an art that encourages bridging the gaps between the sciences, humanities and popular traditions in heritage interpretation.

In re-visiting Schleiermacher's work, we found that his guiding principle of explaining the parts of a phenomenon in terms of a larger whole (explicitly endorsed by Tilden)

remains central to any interpretive task today. Schleiermacher's approach also raises for contemporary professional interpreters the problem of power (i.e., the authority to make interpretations) in the relationship between interpreters and their audience. This is something that interpretive planners need to consider if interpretation is to be owned by its audiences in a democratic and pluralistic society.

In Dilthey, we see that interpretation is always context-dependent and open to extension. It involves moving between different layers of meaning. Such meaning is not automatically given to sensory perception or common sense. It is only by entering the "hermeneutic circle" with its ongoing reference between artefact (or site) and context that our understanding deepens. Hence, Dilthey provides the key to distinguishing interpretation properly from what Tilden would later call "mere information".

Heidegger points to the fact that interpretation always takes place against a background of pre-understandings and it is in light of these that we interpret anything we do not understand. Interpretation is not simply a cognitive event. Rather it involves our whole being as it undergoes a rich variety of experiences within the natural and cultural world. The disclosure of truth then is not a matter of cognitive correspondence but rather of what Tilden would call "revelation," an "un-concealing" of that which is beyond our present purview. The environmental or heritage interpreter, therefore, is not simply representing the world as it is but is rather explicating what has been obscured in the light of our shared pre-understandings. Heidegger also reminds us that science is only one amongst a number of important ways of revealing what is happening in our world. In terms of our continued dwelling within this world, we cannot rely exclusively upon science for meaning and guidance. Poetry, narrative and art are perhaps, in many circumstances, more vital ways of provoking reflection upon our ongoing involvement with natural and cultural heritage.

Gadamer reminds us of the social character of interpretation, due to our reliance on language, history and others to place us at the point at which we can begin to interpret anything at all. It follows that meaning is not inherent in things themselves or cognitive structures but rather in cultural traditions. Recognizing the dynamic mediation of such traditions provides a holistic way of understanding what shapes the heritage tourist experience; giving rise to such things as a "sense of place". Interpretation in this view begins by questioning the tradition(s) in which a heritage artefact or site is situated. It proceeds through dialogue within and between participants in such traditions. In this process, prejudices are explicated, entertained (perhaps in a "playful" manner), tested and subject to revision. According to Gadamer, old meanings are recovered and new meanings emerge, in the interaction between co-interpreters, their tradition(s) and the thing being interpreted. The recovery of such meanings can also bring present understandings into question, sometimes radically. This dialogical process fosters critical reflection and change. However, Gadamer's situated, dialogical and reflexive theory of interpretation suggests that genuine interpretation can never be manipulated or imposed. It is always in the process of becoming a process that professional interpreters can facilitate but not force.

This article has gone some way in showing how hermeneutics might contribute to the ongoing development of interpretation in heritage tourist settings. In particular, it affirms how heritage interpretation might play a catalytic role or, as Michael Glenn (2006) puts it, provide a "vital spark" in stimulating visitor's reflection upon their connections to place and others. As we have shown, such reflection can be educational, imaginative and transformative. At its most ambitious, a hermeneutical approach to heritage interpretation may help facilitate cultural regeneration, an appreciation of diversity and the enactment of new possibilities for social and ecological sustainability.

In short, hermeneutic perspectives have much to offer the conceptualization, planning and practice of heritage interpretation as an inclusive, critical and dialogical endeavour.

If embraced, these approaches would also have significant implications for the evaluation of interpretation. The discussion of these implications, however, requires another article. All that can be said here is that hermeneutics points towards participatory forms of resource management and action research. What this article has sought to do is more basic. It is clearing a path for re-conceptualizing the processes involved in heritage interpretation, particularly the decisive interplay between visitors and culture. In exposing problematic assumptions in past work and proposing a hermeneutic alternative, the case for a broader, polysemic interpretation of interpretation in heritage tourist settings is clear.

Acknowledgement

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