



An Interpretive Dialogue

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1

Discouraged, the interpreter pushed herself away from the computer and headed for the park. The town was dark except for the streetlights. She walked to her favorite places, but found nothing. It got worse when she found a stranger sitting on her bench.

"Can I help you?" the stranger asked cheerfully.

"I work here. Can I help you?"

The man smiled, "Tell me, what you do?"

"I'm an interpreter."

"What does an interpreter do?"

"I give programs to visitors," the interpreter answered automatically.

"You talk to people...is that it?"

"Its not easy. Lots of people don't listen."

"So why do you do it?"

The stranger was about 60 years old with a bit of a paunch and wore a blue suit. He was bald but had white hair around his ears. He had a bright pink complexion, pouched cheeks, pinched nose, and heavy glasses in black frames.

"I do it because this place is important and people should know. It's too bad so many won't stop long enough to learn about it."

"Why should they learn about this place?"

"Because it's special. I wish I could make everybody see why."

2

The interpreter sat down on the bench and asked the stranger his name.

"I am Harold Durfee Nedlit," the man enunciated, "—a professor of philosophy. It is a special place and there are so many people here. They don't all have to learn do they?"

"Of course not, but parks are meaningful places and I don't think they should forget that!"

Nedlit leaned forward. "Parks mean something? What do they mean?"

The interpreter hesitated, " "They mean lots of things."

"Are these meanings tied to the place?"

"What?"

"Are meanings actually part of places or can they be separated from places?"

"I've never thought about it."

"It's fundamental. How can you describe your work if you don't understand the relationship between your place and what it means?"

Nedlit paused. The interpreter said nothing.

"All right, this might help," Nedlit began. "In the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln said, 'We can not dedicate--we can not consecrate--we can not hallow--this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.'

"Now if Lincoln was correct, all of Gettysburg could become a shopping mall and not change the meanings of what occurred there. Do we really lose anything if we lose the place? You can learn all about the Civil War from books and photographs. Why visit or care about places at all?"

"Because the place is powerful. Without the place, meanings would be harder to find and describe--to get people excited about--harder to interpret. Without the place people will forget the meanings"

Nedlit nodded, "Lincoln saw the importance and power of place. His speech ends by demanding the audience embrace the meaning of Gettysburg and take action. 'It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work...' and so on.

Lincoln might say resources are icons or windows to meanings. Each is a symbol or metaphor for a multitude of concepts and emotions. People are surrounded by these

meanings every minute of their lives, but in the day to day economics of things, it's hard to recognize and concentrate on meanings. The power of resources comes from their capacity to focus meanings. Each has its own story or beauty—how it speaks to people about meaning. That's why some seem more powerful than others do. Some have striking and obvious beauty or stories—others are more subtle.

"So, I ask you again, why do we have parks?"

"They are places that give people access to meanings," the interpreter replied.

"Yes! Resources possess meanings and have relevance."

3

The interpreter thought a moment, then objected, "But so many people miss the meanings."

"Ah--so why do they visit?"

"To have a good time."

"Is that all?" Nedlit demanded, "They can enjoy themselves lots of places. What are they after in a resource?"

"Something special. Something of value for themselves."

Nedlit kept on, "Even the ones who want to motorboat on reservoirs and drink beer?"

"Yes, they're not in the office or working a job they hate. But that's my point, they need to have more than fun."

"You want them to find meaning?" Nedlit asked.

"Sure."

"I said resources possess meanings and relevance and you agreed. Then you said visitors are after something of value for themselves. So what is the job of interpretation?"

"Obviously to bring the two together."

"Do you really believe that?"

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Because earlier you said 'I wish I could make everyone see why this place is special.' I think you have to understand you will never *make* the place special. The place has its own

power and meanings. What you can do is help connect the interests of the visitor and the meanings of the resource. That's your job "

The interpreter stood up. "Fine, but it's more complicated than that," she said, "You should come on one of my programs tomorrow and...."

"*But don't you seeee...?*" Nedlit touched her arm. The interpreter sat back down. "Helping visitors connect to meanings is the entire goal. Meaning is more important than knowing! Your job is not to fill their heads with information. Giving people information who want information is important, but it's not interpretation. Even those people who want information want to connect it to meanings. All of your visitors are after meanings—they want to connect to your place intellectually and emotionally.

"Neither is your job to lead people to the meanings you think they should know and feel. Your job is to help people discover their own meanings. When you do your job well, people might come to conclusions you don't agree with. So be it. If people come to care about your park, you've done your job!"

The interpreter countered. "What if they're hurting the park?"

"I'm not suggesting you let people harm the place. I'm talking about what people think and believe.

"You want people to care enough *about* the place so they will help care *for* the place. Care *about* has to come first—attitude before behavior. Who would take action to protect something they don't care about? Raising sensitivity—helping people care *about* is what interpretation does.

"This only works if you view the visitor as sovereign. The people get to choose! No matter how much *you* care, the visitor will ultimately decide whether the park is meaningful and worth preserving. You must meet the visitor on their terms and provide them opportunities to connect both emotionally and intellectually to the meanings of the resource.

"Your goal is to facilitate a connection between the visitor's interests and what the place means in order to establish care about the resource within the visitor."

4

The interpreter said, "Okay, people do connect with their own meanings...but that worries me. I believe in what I talk about. I make choices based on my own background and beliefs. How can I interpret meanings I don't share? Especially if I think and almost everyone else thinks those points of views are wrong?"

"Are accuracy and the truth the same thing?" Nedlit asked.

"Probably not. Accurate information can lead people to different conclusions. I guess truth is something people believe in."

"Were you hired to be accurate or provide the truth as you perceive it?"

The interpreter was frustrated. "I know I can't present my opinion--no matter how much I believe in it, and call it the only truth. But some things people believe in are crazy."

"Your job is to describe other points of view accurately, even if you don't agree. Whose job is it to decide the values and meanings of the resource, the interpreter or the visitor?" Nedlit probed. "Do visitors have a right to their own beliefs?"

"The visitor is sovereign."

"Then the audience should judge an accurate description of an alternative point of view. If you have helped people come to care about the place, they will see action should be taken to protect it.

"Your programs can't cover every possible perspective. You have to choose material that is relevant and provoking to your audience and leave other material out. But you better know enough about your subject to respond thoroughly, respectfully, and professionally whenever an alternative view arises. Good interpreters don't create fiction—they present the multiple meanings of the resource to multiple audience perspectives—accurately. This shows respect for the audience and that makes communication possible. Of course this means you have to know a lot about your place and audiences."

The interpreter's volume increased, "But I do this work because I have passion—I want to save the place!"

"Do you have enough passion to help visitors develop their passion? Nedlit asked. "If not, you'll only communicate with people who already agree."

"But I need to get the preservation message across."

Nedlit countered. "You have to earn the right to deliver that message. Earning it means meeting visitors where they are and helping them make personal connections to the resource. The visitor who wants to drink beer and the pilgrim on a quest both can and need to contribute to the park's survival. They can each come to care more about the place. It's that

simple, and that difficult. It's difficult because it's so easy to preach and fool yourself into thinking you are interpreting."

5

Things were quiet for a moment. Nedlit looked down and rubbed his head with both hands. As a result, his hair stuck straight out on both sides. He was oblivious to his disarray and the winglike effect it gave his face. He squinted towards the interpreter gravely and asked, "What do your parks preserve?"

"Mostly buildings and nature." The interpreter answered with a straight face.

Nedlit took out a pad and wrote it down. "Is that all?"

"No...artifacts, plants, trees, information, culture, heritage...viewsheds...events...I guess we preserve information about people. You'd have to say that about events too I suppose." Nedlit kept writing. "Okay, we also preserve ecosystems and natural processes like glaciation. We preserve animals, wilderness, and objects..."

"What about ideas? Do you preserve ideas?"

"Uh...yeah. You could say we preserve the idea of democracy. We also promote the idea of preservation."

"You said you preserve systems and you supplied some natural examples. What about cultural examples--say, the system of slavery?"

"We don't preserve slavery itself, but we do preserve information, objects, and buildings that are, as you would say, icons for slavery."

"Yes. What about values? Do you preserve the values that supported slavery?"

"I hope not. But we do preserve information about those values."

"What about other values?"

"We preserve things and ideas that people value like beauty and freedom to name a couple."

"Very good." Nedlit showed the interpreter two lists.

Buildings	Nature
Artifacts	Culture
Plants	Heritage
Trees	Values
Ecosystems	Systems
Wilderness	Wilderness
Objects	Process
Information	Ideas
Events	Knowledge

"Now," Nedlit demanded, "what's the difference between these two lists."

"One list is objects that are real. The other list is abstractions."

"Natural sites are places where the beauty, the order, and the power of nature are illustrated in a tangible location. Likewise, cultural and historical sites are real locations where visitors seek to find the energy and effect of events and people. Both are physical manifestations of meanings—and all of their pieces: trees, stone, and water; fences, monuments, and furniture—they all connect an intangible meaning to a physical reality.

"All interpretation is a process of linking a tangible resource to its intangible meanings. All successful interpretive work, talks, walks, signs, exhibits, videos—all make these links! When they are most successful, these links go beyond words and allow visitors to experience meanings in a personal and sometimes indescribable way."

"But you included wilderness on both lists."

"I did that because, for this discussion, it does no good to argue about which list it belongs on. Some people see wilderness as a real and specific place. Others view wilderness as an undefinable idea. We need to understand and be able to communicate both of those meanings.

"It might seem a little complicated at first. In its simplest form, a tangible resource is a specific object, place, or person. But a tangible resource can also be any group of those tangibles, like *all* wilderness or *all* battlefields or the Navaho people. In larger groups, the tangible resource becomes more abstract—nevertheless it can be used as the tangible, the thing the interpreter wants the audience to care more about."

"So when an interpreter focuses on a specific place that is wilderness, he or she might use it as an example of all places that are wilderness"?

"Right. You can also consider events and people from the past as tangible resources—the suffragette movement for example or John Adams. They are interpreted so that they can be preserved. "

"How can I preserve something that doesn't exist anymore?"

"You do it all the time. Why do you think you tell stories about the people who lived in this town? What's the point?"

"I want them to be remembered," she answered.

"That's it! That's all you can do to preserve them—and take care of the of the things they created and lived with of course."

The interpreter considered this for a moment, then smiled. "Remembering is an act of preservation!"

"And not just for human history," said Nedlit. "Natural events like rockslides or geologic periods can be tangible resources as well."

Nedlit stood up abruptly. He walked over to the trashcan and pulled out an empty beer bottle.

"This will do. We'll start simple." he said. "Now, I want you to tell me what this tangible object means. Show me the links."

The interpreter tried. "It's made of glass, it's brown, it's got a label--it's empty."

"It is all of those things. *But don't you seeee...?*" Nedlit moved in close. "...You're giving me information. You're describing this bottle. I asked you what this bottle means."

The interpreter tried again. "I could use it to talk about good times. It represents all sorts of things in our culture like parties, friends, and relaxation."

"Is that all?"

"No...I could also use the bottle to talk about alcoholism and prohibition and self-help groups and twelve-step programs."

"Yes, go on."

"Um, I could talk about advertising and glass making. I guess I could talk about trash and recycling. I could talk about the history of brewing. I could also talk about the person who actually drank the beer out of that bottle."

"Yes, yes. Would any of those links be incorrect?"

"Incorrect? They're all just different perspectives on the same object."

"I agree. Revealing the links gets at the meanings of the tangible object. Let's take another step. I would like you to try a model."

6

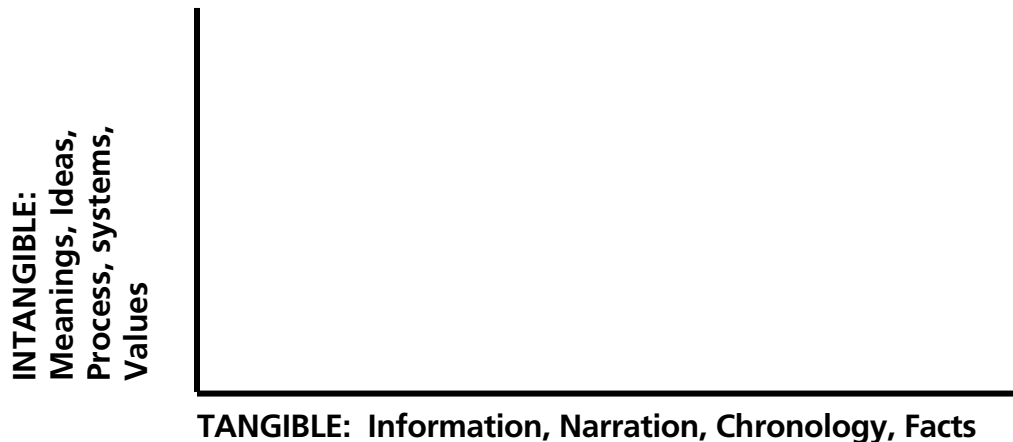
"I will draw a horizontal line." Nedlit showed the interpreter his pad.

TANGIBLE: Information, Narration, Chronology, Facts

"How much interpretation sticks to only the information and the narration? How many programs have you seen that stay on this horizontal line?"

"Way too many--some interpreters give too much detailed information, and some just give trivial information."

"Now I will draw a vertical line. And again, Nedlit handed over the pad.



"How many programs have you seen that stay on this vertical line?"

"I've given those—too many concepts and abstractions. I could see visitors' eyes glaze over."

"You can understand the function of both the tangible and the intangible using the metaphor of art. Blueprint drawings are purely informational illustration. Good ones provide critical information, but unless you are an architect or a builder, they don't move the soul.

"Abstract art represents the intangible. Many know nothing of abstract art and fail to see the artist's intent. We don't have the background to understand the meaning of the piece. Most of us need art that is recognizable, but is somehow moving, meaningful, and even memorable..."

The interpreter interrupted, "I see. What is critical in interpretation is linking the tangible and intangible together. I can't present a program that is mostly information, because it will bore visitors to tears. I also can't present a program that is too conceptual, or they will become confused or feel I'm trying to manipulate them. Successful interpretation depends on a linkage of the two."

"Can you give me an example?"

"Living history. Visitors love it because it's so tangible. It links them to a battlefield that is largely intangible--so difficult to imagine in all its horror--it's too abstract and removed. Living history gives us colors and brass buttons and drawn swords. But too many living history interpreters just talk about the tangible. They can tell you about their buttons, but give you very little meaning."

"What about a natural example?"

"You could say the same thing about live animals and spectacular rock formations. They attract a lot of attention and are tangible, but if you don't go farther than providing a catalog of information about them, there is little meaning involved."

7

Nedlit nodded, then cleared his throat, "Imagine that I am giving an interpretive talk and have an old rifle in my hands. I'll begin:

"This is a model 1841 Harpers Ferry Percussion Rifle. In the 1840s, it represents the very essence of modern times.

"It does so for technological reasons. This weapon was made entirely by machine and entirely with interchangeable parts. It loads from the muzzle and is a rifle. This means there are spiral grooves cut into the barrel that send the ball out with a spiral--just like a correctly thrown football. This gives the weapon great accuracy.

"It fires with a percussion system. This means there is no flint and steel, no spark or flash outside of the weapon as there was with the preceding flintlock system. The hammer of this rifle strikes a small percussion cap, shaped like Abraham Lincoln's top hat. A bead of explosive located in the top of the brass cap ignites when it is hit. This begins the process that sends the bullet on its way.

"I like to think about the human hands that made this rifle because the weapon also represents modern times in terms of the way people lived. Sometimes I imagine the parlor of one of the workers. I think of him living with a large family that includes his father. I like to

listen to their conversations.

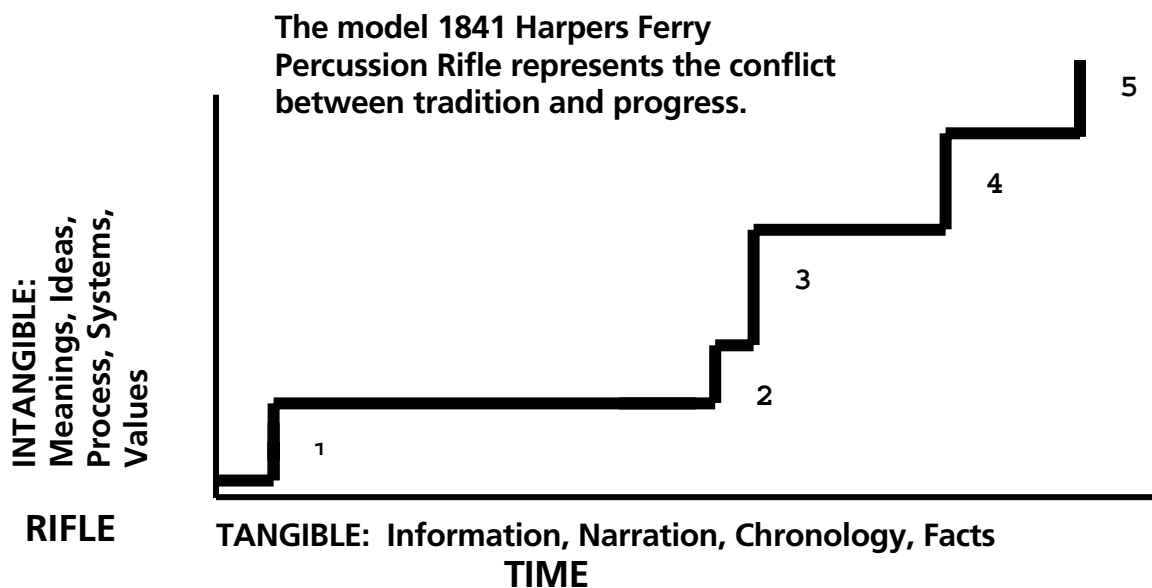
"In my mind, the father often says `Son, you have lost the meaning of 1776. I was a craftsman. I spent eight years of my life working as an apprentice to gain the knowledge and skill needed to make an entire weapon with hand tools. I owned those tools. If I did not like the way I was being treated in the factory, I could move away and set up a gun shop anywhere. I had freedom. I controlled my own destiny. I was proud.

"`But you son. In your wildest dreams you will never own the machines it takes to make a rifle now. The day the men who own those machines decide they no longer need you, you will be lost. You have become a slave to those machines—not a free man.'

"The son responds, `But I'm making more money than you ever could. My home has carpet, my children go to school, and I own books and buy newspapers. You could only afford to buy us things we had to have to stay alive. No Father, I understand what 1776 was about. I am as free as a man can afford to be.'

"Of course the two never understood one another. This leaves us with a question. As we ponder this rifle, an object made of cold metal and dead wood, we might wonder about the men who made it and ask ourselves: What is the essence of freedom?"

Nedlit held up his hand and the interpreter remained silent. Nedlit scribbled on his pad for a long while then passed it over.



The interpreter studied for a few minutes, then said, "I need some explanation."

"You've probably noticed I have set up an x, y axis."

The interpreter grimaced. "I hate math!"

"Bear with me," Nedlit said with a chuckle. "I graphed the opportunities for connections to the meanings of the resource I presented in my talk. An opportunity for a connection to meanings is a tangible/intangible link developed by an interpretive delivery

method—a story, presentation of evidence, quotes, illustration—or other presentation techniques.

“I described the horizontal or tangible line as ‘time,’ for the time required to present my program. The rifle was my main tangible.”

“You also used the father and the son and their house,” the interpreter objected.

“You’re right. As the interpreter, I want my audience to care about the Industrial Revolution—an event, as well as the people who lived through it. The father and son were vehicles for telling that part of the story. I also want my audience to care about more than just this one rifle—I hope they associate its symbolism with other weapons from the period as well. And surely I would like people to remember the rifle came from Harpers Ferry—the tangible place that preserves the rifle’s story.

“All of these are tangibles—but the icon or portal that allows me include them is *the* rifle. It is the specific starting point and through line that makes the whole program go.”

“But the rifle isn’t even here. How can you claim it’s tangible?”

“Because it’s an easily recognizable object. We both knew, basically, what I was talking about.

“The graph illustrates some of the tangible aspects of the rifle—its information, as well as some of the intangible meanings of the rifle. The vertical lines depict the tangible/intangible links. I also provided information through interpretive delivery methods that explained or qualified those tangible/intangible links. The horizontal lines depict that information. The links and information together provide opportunities for the audience to make personal connections to the rifle.

“I began by providing some basic information. The horizontal line that begins at the meeting of the two axis represents that information. The first time I linked the rifle to an intangible meaning was when I made the statement, ‘In the 1840s, it represents the very essence of modern times.’ Note number 1 on my graph labels the first vertical line. I then developed that link with an interpretive delivery method—I made a presentation of evidence about how the weapon represented modern times for technological reasons. The horizontal line represents that information to the right of the 1. I then linked the weapon to the people who made it—see number 2. I provided just a bit of information about one gunmaker’s living arrangements. I then linked the tangible weapon to the intangibles of craftsmanship and one definition of freedom at number 3. I used the character of the gunmaker’s father as a tool for interpretive presentation. He conveyed information about craftsmanship and freedom. Then I linked the intangibles of affluence and a differing definition of freedom to the gun at number 4. The son provided the interpretive vehicle for information about the Industrial Revolution and some of the attitudes toward freedom that developed with it. Finally, with number 5, I linked the weapon to freedom by asking the audience a rhetorical question.

“The graph is a tool that helps interpreters organize programs and think through the opportunities they want to provide for connecting to the meanings of the resource. The graph also shows that an interpretive program develops an idea. I hope each link I present provokes visitors. I hope the information I provide helps them understand new meanings. But I also have to arrange those links and to say something larger about the rifle. If I do it well, visitors will

think of the rifle differently.”

“What do you mean “something larger?”

8

“A successful interpretive product cohesively develops an idea or ideas about the resource. It’s not enough to provide related information or even disjointed meanings. Interpretation says something—expresses an idea. A series of facts or a chronological narrative just doesn’t provide enough relevance to connect enough people to the place—a compelling idea does. All the parts of the program have to work together to develop that idea so the audience can make personal connections to the meanings of the resource.”

“You’re talking about a theme. It’s there on your graph.”

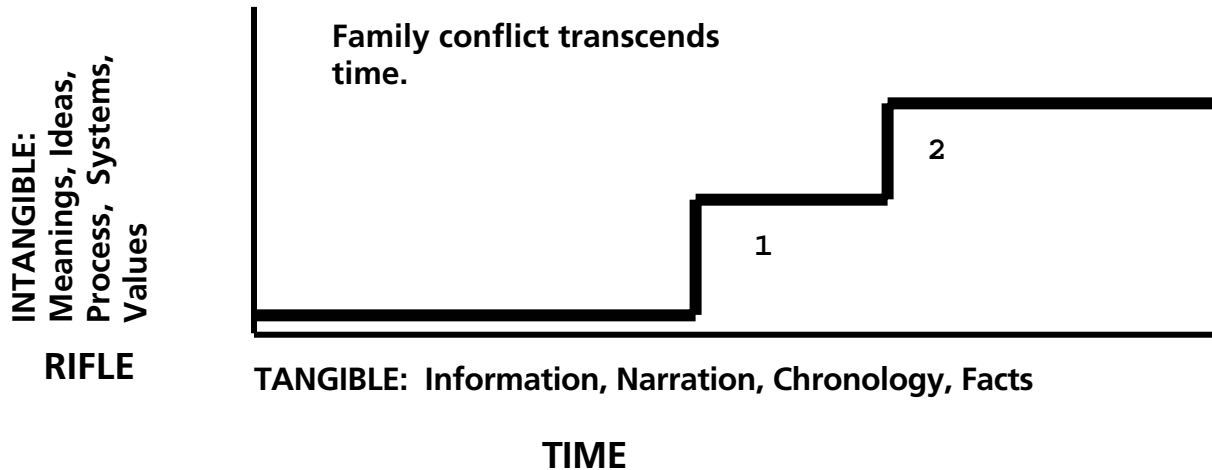
“You’re right,” Nedlit agreed. “An interpretive theme links the tangible to an intangible and expresses an idea. A theme is used to cohesively develop the central idea of an interpretive product. My theme was ‘The model 1841 Harpers Ferry Percussion Rifle represents the conflict between tradition and progress.’ I used that theme to select my links and supporting information as well as organize the program. But that doesn’t mean the audience connected with that theme—or needed to.”

The interpreter looked puzzled.

Nedlit pushed ahead. “Let me show you. The connections graph can be viewed from another perspective. The interpreter has a graph that plans the program and the visitor has an imaginary graph that records the personal connections they made to the meanings of the resource through the program. It’s hard for some interpreters to accept the visitors’ charts will look different.”

“You’re moving too fast, I’m not following.”

"My graph showed the links and opportunities for connecting I wanted to offer. Remember, though, the visitor is sovereign. The audience will rarely take all the opportunities I facilitate. For example, I believe many visitors would draw their graph like this." Again, Nedlit started to draw.



"A visitor who drew this graph would have been bored by the technology of the weapon. The last link about freedom didn't work either—likely too patronizing. My theme didn't speak clearly to this visitor nor did all of my links and information. But, this person did make personal connections through the father and son. If asked, the visitor might say the program's idea was: 'Family conflict transcends time.' That's a different than my theme. "

"You're saying that's okay?" the interpreter asked.

"Yes. Interpretation is art. When you look at a painting, you have your own relationship to the work. You will find your own meaning or you won't. Your understanding of the meaning of the painting may overlap with the artist's intent, but it will surely not coincide exactly. If the piece is truly good you will see personal meanings the artist was never aware of.

"A good interpreter tries to say something important—but knows that ultimate success is when the viewer connects the message with his or her own experience."

"You're telling me that the audience doesn't need to get my theme. Hey, I'm happy to drop the theme altogether."

Nedlit answered with a supercilious smile. "*But don't you seeee...Of course you need a theme! But you also need to know the audience doesn't have to walk away with it burned in their minds.*" He was almost growling. "Look, themes are tools just like organization, grammar, body language...All artists have tools. A painter learns about color and perspective before the masterpiece is on canvas. A concert cellist practices scales but performs music.

"No interpreter gets very far without tools. Tangible/Intangible links and the information that explain them are the vehicle interpreters use to reveal and provoke. But you have to use good techniques for presenting them. Any interpreter can ruin a perfectly good link by delivering it poorly."

9

Nedlit was not finished. "There is more to this linking the tangible to its meanings. Are all meanings equally powerful?"

"No. The visitor is sovereign. Some links work better for some people than others."

"What was most meaningful to you in my talk?"

"Freedom—and I was thinking about fathers and sons fighting."

Nedlit leaned back, "Now what do freedom and family have in common?"

The interpreter said, "Just about everyone can connect with them."

"Exactly. You can label a whole group of intangibles `universal concepts." They are relevant to almost everyone.

"But not everyone will agree on what family or freedom mean."

"They don't have to. Though all people have widely different points of view about specific universal concepts, the concepts themselves are relevant to almost everyone."

"Yeah—my best programs—the interpretation that works every time. They're about concepts like beauty, race, change, family, spirit..."

"Give me more."

"Power, pain, uh... probably nature itself, God, survival, love, sex, hate, sacrifice is another one, maybe bravery and cowardice. The list could go on and on. Whoa! It's like mythology."

This time Nedlit interrupted, "Or the Bible, or the Koran, or Shakespeare, or even soap operas. We're talking about the questions and forces and forms of the universe. Some call them archetypes. Universal concepts are the stuff people have been making stories about and trying to figure out since the beginning of human history. They are the intangible meanings

that are most relevant to the most number of people. Meanings that few people agree on, but most everyone cares about.”

“How could all cultures and people relate to these subjects?”

“‘Universal’ is probably too big a word, but I don’t have another. I’m sure some of these concepts are more meaningful to some than others.

“What’s important is some concepts are more relevant to more people and are more effective for the interpreter to use. We could argue whether a given concept is universal or not but in the end interpreters have to decide for themselves.”

“I can see how this works for history—there’s so much human to talk about.”

“Think about it! Writers, speakers, and interpreters have been connecting plants, animals, fossils, and features to intangible processes, ecosystems, ideas, values, and universal concepts since humans began to think about nature as something worth conserving. Universal concepts like beauty, time, harmony, power, complexity, survival, sex, and change are powerful and at the very center of good natural history interpretation. A universal concept like family has a different meaning in cultural or historical contexts, but it allows humans to communicate about and explore those differences.”

10

Nedlit worked over his paper some more, then handed it over.

<u>Tangibles</u>	<u>Intangibles</u>	<u>Universal Concepts</u>
Buildings	Nature	Freedom
Artifacts	Culture	Family
Plants	Heritage	Race
Trees	Events	Power
Ecosystems	Systems	God
Wilderness	Wilderness	Hate
Objects	Process	Sacrifice
Information	Ideas	Beauty
	Values	Change
	Knowledge	Survival

He said, "You can use those lists to develop any interpretive product. You need to make the lists specific to your resource first. Right now those words are abstractions, but if you select a tangible from your place and then brainstorm all the potential intangible meanings that could be linked to it..."

"Like we did with the beer bottle."

"Yes—you should have a pretty long list and some of those links would be to universal concepts. You still won't have a program—you'll need to decide specifically what it will be about."

"I'll need a theme so I can cohesively develop an idea."

"You've got it. Here's something new though," Nedlit warned. "I said earlier that themes link a tangible to an intangible. The most powerful themes do that by linking the tangible to a universal concept. That kind of theme will help you choose other links that support the idea. Not all those links have to appeal to a universal—but they should help the development of the program's main idea that does."

"And finally I figure out what information to include and what techniques to use to present it all."

"Just like an artist. You're trying to provide opportunities for the audience to make their own emotional and intellectual connections to the meanings of the resource you're interpreting."

"Yeah," the interpreter responded and then fell silent. Finally she said, "It's scary."

"You said the place was important."

"I still can't prove why."

"You will never prove the importance of this place to everyone. You will only be able to create opportunities for people to realize it on their own."

"Interpreters are artists and teachers. They have to allow others to find their own meanings. Their art expresses—but it also has to communicate. When you are an artist and a teacher, not an entertainer or spokesman, when you deal with meanings that are relevant to your audiences, you move people to care. You hold influence and power. You don't change all the attitudes you hope to—but you affect far more than you realize."

Again there was silence. Eventually it was Nedlit who spoke, “Really, we haven’t been talking about new ideas. We’ve just arranged them in a different way. Everyone struggles for meanings and everyone wants to communicate. This tangible/intangible model is just your description of what interpretation does—it won’t work for everyone. Those it does not work for can find other descriptions just as powerful and useful—and they will also find those descriptions in themselves.”

Nedlit and the interpreter sat on the bench, a place she had known for years. There, she had discussed a hundred different programs and talked with and about thousands of visitors. The head of a nail was working up out of the wood. The interpreter pressed it with her thumb. Suddenly she raised her head and looked Nedlit squarely in the eye.

“When will you be back?” she asked.

Nedlit smiled, “*Don’t you seeee... the next time you need me.*”