

AS FOUND abstract

Landscape exists within human perception. The unseen histories and stories of a place are part of our collective identity. Methodologies generally employed in landscape site-research are inadequate, ignoring the iterative and sometimes messy nature of genuine discourse with those closest to the site, its history and anecdotal culture. The 'as found' identity of each site depends on where you look. The digging needs to go deeper, into the basement, the archives and cellars – to primary sources. The process of collecting, organising and reinterpreting this identity in a designed landscape will be examined in this paper through the study of recent projects by the authors.

Within a communal landscape how can we balance a longing for agreement and democracy with a need to discern, contest, inspire, and be intuitive? Is it possible to define a formal methodology for a process that is partly dependent on instinct and subjectivity?

In Britain, our practice [BCA Landscape] has recently completed two projects that drew on our own personal, cultural and political values to order the 'as found' information from site:

Burscough Bridge was culturally smothered by the A59 road, which thunders through it. We became deeply immersed with the local community in the town's stories, incorporating diverse themes ranging from pace-egging [a street dance] through the WWII American airfield, to the remnants of medieval Burscough Abbey. These stories from the past mingle with contemporary references from film [Sleepy Hollow], TV [The Mighty Boosh], music [Midlake], photography [Homer Sykes] and poetry [Ted Hughes] resulting in a new identity.

Market Place in Cockermouth is surrounded by well-preserved, colourful Georgian facades with a strong historic identity, but the expanse of bitmac between them was just another bland car-oriented space. We set about uncovering cultural elements of the site; from records of 18th century court sessions and 19th century maps came colourful characters and patterns. The antics of cheeky Salathiel Court and Cousin Charley's Day celebrations are depicted as separate and equally important entities. The paving is set out according to the regionally distinctive burgage plots on a tithe map; each bollard and manhole cover tells an anecdote.

For both schemes, the visual motifs do not function as straightforward memorials or illustrations of the past, but as allusive artworks with multiple and ambiguous readings, encouraging different points of view rather than one correct message; a reflection of the cultural complexity of a human settlement.

Keywords: *identity; stories; culture*

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