

Branding Cities: a case study of collaborative methodologies in Cultural, Film, and Marketing research

Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, University of Technology, Sydney

Stephanie.Donald@uts.edu.au

and

John Gammack, Griffith University

J.Gammack@gu.edu.au

Collaboration

This paper examines the possibilities offered by multi-disciplinary research in cultural studies, and film studies, marketing and psychology. We discuss the collection, evaluation and analysis of primary and secondary data in a current project, noting both the benefits and challenges of working across quite different paradigms of thought and vocabulary and expected outcome. Our concern in the paper is to demonstrate the value of collaboration in cultural research, whilst also acknowledging the problems of establishing a working and meaningful discursive field across disciplinary boundaries, interests, and methodological habits. Collaboration is presented here as a continuum across researchers, team members and participants in the fieldwork.

The project, *Branding Cities on the West Pacific Rim* started through an interdisciplinary research group 'technology and culture', when applications for seeding research encouraged academics to combine skills and expertise in both posing and answering cross disciplinary questions. The 'technology and culture' grouping gave rise to dialogue between cultural theorists, new media theorists, psychologists and a research group specialising in electronic commerce (CECIS). Perhaps an unlikely combination, but one which did produce some understanding of how disciplines differ, why they *must* differ in order to answer the problems that they find in the world, and how occasional strategic partnerships help researchers to achieve intellectual and pragmatic growth. The questions thus asked and answered may be no more or less pressing than those asked within the bounds of accepted disciplinary

structures, but the difficulties thus posed force the researchers to re-examine their practices, differentiate their expectations, and acknowledge their weaknesses.

In our case we discovered first that we were interested in how online transactions and marketing were capable of transforming everyday experience. In particular, how does the destination-image in tourism marketing address the affective sensibilities of a prospective tourist, and is that qualitatively different from the address of other powerful media which also use locations, such as film? Fortuitous interviews with tourism officials in Hong Kong persuaded us that global cities – already a serious topic for film-makers and film theorists – would provide the situated depth of visuality that we sought. These preliminary discussions were followed up by a presentation to the then HK Tourism Commissioner (Rebecca Lai) on the greening of Hong Kong. We emphasised the theoretical value of the ‘idea of the city’ in suggesting new versions of the urban experience (for instance, ‘greening’) to the underlying structures of attention embedded in residents’ experience of the place itself, and that should include a sensitivity to the cinematic image. That has led in turn to the work discussed in this paper.

Given the triple focus at the core of the study (cinema and tourism and the branded city), this project required that we found ways of explaining our aims not only to ourselves, and our research team, but also to a wide range of interviewees and focus group participants. The methods that we chose to collect data often involved sharing various sorts of information with the participants, in a process of shared mental mapping. The model is similar to that used by art historian, James Elkins, who analyses the production of history in part through the use of intuitive maps. He uses these ‘unguarded and informal’ (2002, 11) maps to elicit information from students and professional colleagues. They are asked to ‘draw’ the history of art and to represent themselves somewhere in the drawing. He claims for this technique, not a polished version of art history, but ‘insight ... into the necessity of thinking about the shape of your imagination’ (11). The maps that we have elicited from participants are verbal, free form interviews that invite people with varying types of local expertise to enunciate *their idea of the city through a particular medium*, cinematic or touristic. Our role is to translate the ‘shape of their imagination’ into diagrammatic and discursive representations for dissemination to academics, students and the parties themselves.

The placing of the speaker in the mapping conversations was for us however, not a simple matter. Film professionals might talk about their own films and those of directors they admire, but then require that we also discussed our work, and our perceptions of the city in which we were ‘outsiders’, and therefore to reveal ourselves emplaced as embodying the role of incidental voyeur and tourist. We used the suggestions of all film-oriented interviewees (professionals) to guide our selection of films for further analysis, and to select audience groups. The research team was thus collaborating at every stage of the work with participants as well as with each other, ‘a way of listening to people and learning from them’ (Morgan, 1998, 9; quoted Madriz, 2000, 835). Tourism managers and urban planners also addressed us as potential tourists at some stage of the interview, advising us on routes and special activities that would allow us to ‘see’ the city (Sydney / Hong Kong /Shanghai) more effectively. In the Sydney case, this was easily achieved as the offices looked out over the Harbour. In Hong Kong, an interviewee (the Deputy Tourism Commissioner) became the interrogator, asking whether we had children, checking on our nationality, what purchases we needed to make before returning home, and whether we had good walking shoes and stamina! Only then did he deliver a suggested schedule for our free time. The same role reversal in potential interview situations took place with film-makers and critics. In Hong Kong (2003), an invitation to the Hong Kong Film Critics Society annual dinner became a conversation about contemporary Hong Kong and Australian films, hosted by HKFC and where we were expected to produce insider interpretations of recent Australian films, such as *Rabbit Proof Fence* (Noyce, 2002)¹. We were again both guests and interlocutors at that event. Part of the information sharing and role assignment was the normal process of settling an interviewee and establishing a commonality between interlocutors, where ‘establishing rapport with the participants is key to eliciting high quality information’ (Madriz, 2000, 845), but in many instances it was a more extensive practice in that the researchers themselves were cast as tourists and observers by the interviewees. We have taken from these encounters a permission to enter ourselves as collaborators in the narratives that unfold in these conversations. We also take from this that there is a tendency amongst professionals to place us within the body of their work – the city – and urban representations in cinema. It also appears that they are taking a phenomenological

¹ Particularly successful on DVD in Hong Kong as the cinematographer is Christopher Doyle, a well known resident of the city, and Director of Photography star of Hong Kong and Asian cinema.

approach to their work, which supports our hypothesis that the idea of the city is founded and maintained through structures of attention that are associated closely with many aspects of daily interaction with other people, and with media sources. This in turn supports the underlying questions to the project, which at this stage are derived from a phenomenological approach to cinematic reception: how does the experience of being in a particular city relate to the experience of watching a specific film?

In structuring our meetings with respondents we have, therefore, used, and are intending to deploy in the future, textual, visual and cinematic elicitation (film extracts, stories and postcards); occupation specific focus groups (cinematographers, urban planners, audience members, backpackers); extended administered questionnaires (senior strategists and directors), location-based surveys (street interviews), and backed this data up with image-based content and cluster analysis, participant observation and concept mapping.

The development of ideas across the life of the project in part derives from the necessity of translating disciplinary perspectives into a common language, and to eventually work towards a transferable discourse. We argue here that this attempt has two possible coterminous effects. The deliberate transfer of ideas and terminologies across disciplines allows us to question the buffers of familiar jargon, and to make vocabulary broach complex meanings. It also reduces the meaning of the ideas and the words used to something less useful in the disciplinary application. So, although we do produce some complex maps, using words and free drawing, we also try to codify associative talk through diagrams adapted from data modelling systems used in information systems. One of the hardest parts of this project is to judge whether simplicity or reduction, development or bastardisation is in play at what point of the collaboration.

In exploring collaborative discourse this paper discusses and illustrates some of the methodological ideas that we have employed to date, focussing mainly on the first case study, Hong Kong. We first give a brief summary of our findings, expressed in terms that are hopefully familiar to readers of this journal. We then introduce the parameters of data modelling and analysis design that have been drawn directly from disciplines other than cultural research. We test these models through results, that we understand as cultural and historical *insights*, rather than as proven quantitative *information*. Finally we return to the source of our enquiry, the cinematic phenomenology of touristic experience in the city, to evaluate what we have learned,

and what ways of expressing that knowledge have become available to us through collaboration.

Branding History

There is a complicated historical matrix emerging from this investigation. First, the selection of the three cities depends in part on their shared geo-politics. Situated on the West Pacific Rim, the three cities are both central to the region and liminal to the urban imaginations of the ecologies of power centred in London, Washington and the EC. There are aspects of settlement and colonisation that all three cities share, as much as there is a gulf of experience that separates and distinguishes them. The Chinese cities, Hong Kong and Shanghai, have traces – in Hong Kong’s case still very thick – of European visitation and activity (Carroll, 1999). Sydney’s origins as a European city on Indigenous land is the typical Australian story, but its long engagement with China, through Pacific trade-runs, food production and labour, is also a core demographic of the city. In 1996, 48.8% of Australia’s Chinese population lived in New South Wales and 75% of those people lived in Sydney, (in 2002 one in twenty Sydney households spoke some Chinese at home²). Second, the cities all have a strong cinematic identity, either as locations, or as production centres or both. These cinemas have histories, as do the cities, which they memorialise on film. Thirdly, the tourism industries³, as the professional overseers of the marketing and management of visitation, also have ‘histories’. These are histories of making the city an attractive destination for visitors, and in Sydney, recognisable government sponsored campaigns to attract domestic visitors, as opposed to international efforts to attract potential European migrants, have been running since the 1950s. In Hong Kong and Shanghai the ‘semiotics of attraction’ (MacCannell, 1976/1999: 109) are embedded in the mythologies of colonial and expatriate lore. Thus the histories of sovereignty and internationalisation impact immediately on the meanings of the ‘tourist’ in the West Pacific Rim. How and when are tourists to be distinguished in colonial settlements,

² ‘Ethnic pot-pourri the nation’s most diverse’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 18th 2002.

³ For a discussion of the distinctions between modern tourism and travel, and between migration, mobility and tourism, see Rojek and Urry (1997, 1-10 and passim). The disciplinary field of tourism studies is an enormously large area of enquiry, encompassing discussions of spatiality and modernity (see for example Oakes, 2002), leisure and identity (Kwiatkowska, 1999), and the seminal work is still Dean MacCannell’s recognition of the tourist as the quintessential figure of modern existence, travelling for the experience of difference.

when part of the reasons for seeking an overseas posting might echo the reasons that contemporary travellers 'do tourism'? There is clearly an opportunity for a wider discussion of trading routes and imperial travel in the connections between the tourism industries and the attitudes and branding strategies they adopt. Here, we concentrate on the organisation of visitation through dedicated branding activities, but the complication of historical understanding is never far from the analytical surface.

Unsurprisingly then, one of our first core findings is that local historical memory and the cultural narratives that sustain such remembrance are of interest to tourism strategists. In Hong Kong, there are place-histories, which may come closer to retrieving the character of the city in the long term than either the outworn tag of east meets west or the ambitious claims of 'Asia's Global City'. In 2003 we found that interviewees were anxious to articulate, on film and in theatre, but also in conversation, a history of Hong Kong which would remember its Chineseness without forgetting its radicalism, its internationalism, and its suffering. So, in the wake of SARS a film series *1:99* (Donald, 2004), sponsored by the Tourism Commission and the Hong Kong Film Directors Association, memorialised the bravery of Hong Kong residents in the context of a series of challenges stretching from the Japanese invasion (1941), through Typhoon Wanda (1962), the demonstrations of 1968, cholera, drought, and SARS. In these short films, the history of Hong Kong is removed from external interests, the discussion of British or Chinese sovereignty, and reinstated as an experiential trajectory for residents. In the same year (2003), there were retrospectives of key early twentieth century Cantonese film-makers. Law Dun and Lai Man-wai, and a theatre production extolling Lai (1893-1953) as the (Cantonese) father of Chinese film. Lai studied in Hong Kong but was born in Guangdong and moved frequently between the two centres in response to the vagaries of war in the first half of the last century. In so doing he became part of the establishment of Hong Kong as an alternative film-making space for Chinese talent. The same exodus occurred after 1949 when many Shanghai based film-makers migrated south. The 110th anniversary production is a celebration of Lai himself, but also indicative of Hong Kong in 2003 as a place with a will to control its historical narrative.

We question whether these 'thick' histories are sufficiently respected and communicated both to the residents and the visitors by tourism initiatives, and we suggest that 1990s brand identity might be better served in the twenty-first century by a pluralistic approach to urban identity on the Rim. Branding the city encompasses

(for the brand designers) an articulation of corporate identity where urban space performs place as though it were an extremely large and complex company interest. A strategic brand platform has five core aims: an immediate recognition from the market, an attractive proposition for the market, a statement of sustainable difference from other products (here, places), long-term viability, and positive susceptibility to various aspects of development (Temporal, 2000, 51). Translating those strategies to place branding, we can argue that historical depth is crucial. Places are differentiated not only by their physical forms and architectures, but also by the contexts of their construction and development, by the known experiences of usage, and by the currency of the memories, which attach to them. Arguably, the maintenance of cultural memory will sustain and transfigure the tests of the present by re-appropriating the spaces created by 'aspects of development' for use by residents. Thus, whilst an immediate recognition for the Hong Kong brand, as an ex-British colony, may have been east meets west until 1997, this now has to pitched as China meets the world for Mainland Chinese visitors, whereas neither statement fully captures the complexity of emotions with which Hong Kong residents negotiate their Chinese and Hong Kong identities. Such complexity is occasionally captured on film. Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* (1987), starred Anita Mui and Leslie Cheung, as two lovers trapped in sediments of time by the betrayal of the Cheung's character when he failed to honour a suicide pact in the 1930s. The film follows Mui as she searches for her past in the morass of modern development that has stifled its memory. When she finally meets the now aged Cheung, he is a great disappointment, a man who has failed to live up to the romantic standards of the past. This is a text where Hong Kong is succinctly summarised as a cluttered space, where histories jostle for physical expression and where the present literally topples the sites of the past. Although generically a ghost film, yet, by presenting the past as a walking inhabitant of the present, *Rouge* also presents the everyday experience of Hong Kong to its audience. The challenge for the research is to capture the layered histories of the city, as a destination and a location, and as immanent in the experience of those who work and live there.

Research Models in Translation

Concept mapping, or conceptual mapping is a term used variously in different literatures. Cognitive science, management science, information systems, cognitive linguistics, artificial intelligence and psychology are just some fields that address this issue. We describe our approach to the term as a bridge between those disciplines and the present work in cultural research. Broadly the term refers to attempts to visualise relationships among concepts, using a diagrammatic representation for convenience. The nature of the diagrams, the scope and focus of the representation, and the semantics of the relationships structure all vary across the formalisms used, and with the purpose of the map.

Maps range from individually designed and generated, to representations of group processes, to outcomes abstracted from other sources. They also vary in terms of the degree of formality they embody, from simply descriptive with nominal and subjectively meaningful associations, through to graph structures with mathematical properties, such as directional and/or numerically weighted links, and with identified dimensionality.

What they tend to have in common is the form of a structure in which **concepts** (or in terminology from specific literatures variously called *entities*, *things*, *nodes*, *points* or *vertices*) are associated by **relationships** (or *arcs*, *links*, *edges*) with the assumption that this represents a meaningful organisation of material. The meaning will depend on the purpose of the representation, and the semantics may be subjective only, formally sanctioned, or a selective abstraction from evidence.

The maps may be considered to homologously represent an externally organised reality, or a convenient and communicable impression of some constructed understanding. Whilst in principle any concept may have a relationship to any other, generally some selection process will apply in explicating understanding, bringing some relationships into relatively greater focus, and conferring a meaning conditioned by the theory brought to bear in the selection.

Some different types of conceptual map are as follows:

1. The mind map

This is a popular and intuitive, (although only loosely academically credentialed) technique originated by Tony Buzan in the 1960s⁴ and since registered as a commercial mark. It is mentioned here to locate it, and because it shares qualities with other forms. Claims made for the technique include its ability to provide an overview of an area, to gather and hold large amounts of data, and aid in organising and memorising notes and similar material. The visual aspect allows patterns to be detected or shaped, and communicated using attributes of visual languages, including colour, size, spacing, shading, symbolisation and emphasis. Their form is organised around a central topic, with branches leading off around it, and sub-branches and leaves giving details. Various software products support development of mind maps.

The semantics of such maps are subjective, and a typical context is lecture note taking or revision. The colours and shaping are chosen to be personally meaningful, and this helps memorisation. The author personally used the technique in the mid 1970s to organise his O-grade history revision – roughly 30 years later he still has some image of the map colours! An argument that it is the process of engagement with the notes rather than the resultant map can be made regarding the representation's memorability.

An indicative mind map for the branding cities project is reproduced below to reflect a simple understanding of the topic “city icons”:

⁴ <http://www.mind-map.com/>

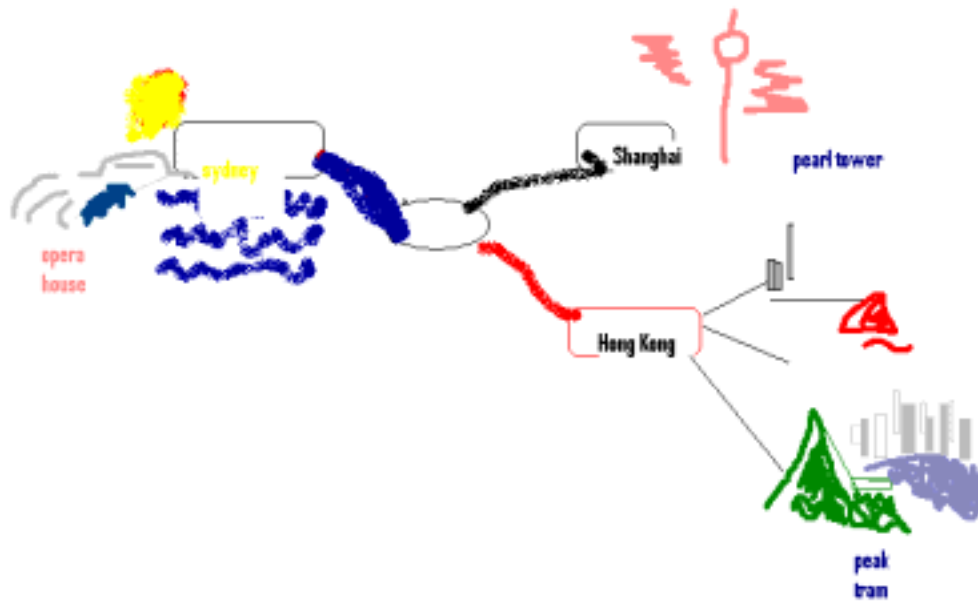


Figure One – Mind map representing subjective understanding of relevant city icons

2. Cognitive mapping

This method lies within a more obviously academic tradition, (Eden, Jones and Sims, 1979) and also represents subjective personal or group thinking on a topic or issue. The links have direction; implying causality between concepts and “cause maps” is a synonymous term. They are explicitly distinguished (Eden, 2004) from mind maps and from influence diagrams (Schachter 1986). Their nodes embody constructive contrasts on an issue, following a key idea from Kelly (1955). In addition the maps are much larger, have a management strategy and operation focus and have more properties amenable to formal analysis. They embody hierarchical and linked organisation, allow for detection of feedback loops in the structure and are suited to surfacing and structuring complex issues for discussion and reflection rather than being a model.

Software support is available for cognitive mapping, but in our research we opted instead to run focus groups, where researchers and research assistants took extensive notes from discussions between individuals in the same professional group. In most cases these people knew each other and had perhaps encouraged one another

to attend the meeting. The conversation was structured through a questionnaire but the direction of conversation often lingered on themes where the participants felt most passionate, conversant and competent in their responses. The structures of attention which inform the design of the project are 'nostalgia', 'everyday' life' and 'aspiration'. They are, if you like, the hierarchical elements of the conversations in a focus group and in individual interviews. All respondents are asked directly to think about those structures of attention at the beginning and towards the end of the meetings. This is the main mode of researcher intervention and management of their responses to the 'idea of the city'.

A focus group held in Brisbane (June 2003) brought together productions designers, cinematographers and theorists to discuss Sydney as a location. However, given that all of the participants were now based in Queensland (although none considered themselves 'Queenslanders') the conversation quickly turned to a comparative discussion of Brisbane and Sydney as cinematic sites in the Australian film industry.

Brisbane tries to imitate Sydney in terms of raising its profile through events, but hasn't got the marketing side of things down like Sydney has. Sydney is a large financial centre that can draw cash from around the world. (MR, Resp.1)

...

Sydney has views everywhere whilst Brisbane has just the view of the river. (NM Resp. 2)

...

[On Nostalgia]: 25 years in Sydney and Melbourne couldn't really feel nostalgia embedded. Nostalgia can go wrong. It's a new adventure to move from Melbourne to Queensland. Coming to Queensland feels like coming to Australia, to discover Australia and Aussie, in Gold Coast, people drive wheels, surfing, a beach culture (NM Resp. 2)

Sydney is a place where young people go to find themselves, like New York, London ... [On Aspiration]: sometimes it is a city of broken dreams, people brought success, but interestingly, in Sydney you see old people but in Brisbane only see young people, very young people city. When young people all go to Sydney, why they will be here? (A. Resp. 3)

[On Nostalgia]: The harbour is very nostalgic, particularly that sense of ancients, you can see history, whilst Brisbane is larger and more alive (A. Resp 3).

The direction of the conversation (only a small portion of which is reproduced above) traces a shift from describing the cities as locations to articulating the experience of living in them as a personal narrative. It might also be significant that two respondents (I and 3)– both of whom had been born in Australia – kept ‘returning’ in their conversation to the ultimate qualities of the place they had left (Sydney). The three (long term) migrants in the group were more able to shift their loyalties from one city to another, and could not identify nostalgia in a particular place, but preferred to emphasise the everyday life and aspirational qualities of all the cities they knew (Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne). The cognitive mapping that this suggests is the emergence of personal place histories as an organising concept in formulating a professional version of the city as a location. This links to the experience of researchers that they were themselves ‘placed’ as experiential subjects when in conversation with film-makers and tourism strategists.

3. Concept mapping

This is a technique developed within education theory by JD Novak (1991). It assumes that human memory has an associative structure that assimilates new concepts and that meaningful learning occurs through structuring and restructuring concepts. Concepts are considered to be “perceived regularities in, or records of events or objects” (REF). As such they warrant identification, labelling or naming. Propositions connect concepts into meaningful statements, referring to a natural or constructed occurrence. An analogy can be drawn between atoms and molecules: once combined, higher order building blocks both enable and constrain particular forms of organisation. Building on old ideas and adding new ideas provides a constructivist and evolutionary basis for mapping the traces of knowledge and learning.

A hierarchical form is assumed, with the most inclusive concepts at the top of the map, and constructed in detail within that in the context of the purpose of the exercise. (see example at <http://cmap.coginst.uwf.edu/info/>) Since cross-links are

possible, a network can be constructed. Relationships are defined along the lines characterising the meaning of the relationship between two selected concepts. Maps are indefinitely revisable, in keeping with the epistemology of constructivist philosophy. The theory is further outlined on a dedicated website⁵ (also Trochim, 1989) and an abbreviated example is shown in figure 2 for the notion of Narrative as a major concept that is dependent on others for its realisation (developed from Gammack, 1987).

Figure Two (below) is provocative. Diagrammatic descriptions that allow only a few directional and associative verbs immediately attract dissension from a more discursive paradigm of argumentation. Does memory revert to feeling in all cases of cinematic spectatorship (for example), or do some cultural memories (of childhood, of traumatic historical events) remain fixed identifiers of place, which cannot be appropriated by a more generalised story of loss, sadness, happiness (whatever feeling is both required and provoked in the narrative). These are questions which the researchers themselves see as ‘hanging’ in this particular diagram. This provocation is part of the design of the method, however, at least in its original formulations in data management. Jackson and Trochim (2002) find the method particularly suitable for analysing open-ended questions and in situations, which are pre-theoretical or where competing theories exist. In analyses where imposing a coding bias from researchers is inappropriate, or when such coding frameworks are yet to be reified the technique is also considered valuable (Jackson and Trochim, 333). Figure Two does not suggest an imposition to researchers who are seeking outcomes in the forms of coding, but in cultural research, where words are the usual medium for disseminating research outcomes, the ‘word’ is not ‘pre-theoretical’.

⁵ <http://cmap.coginst.uwf.edu/info/>

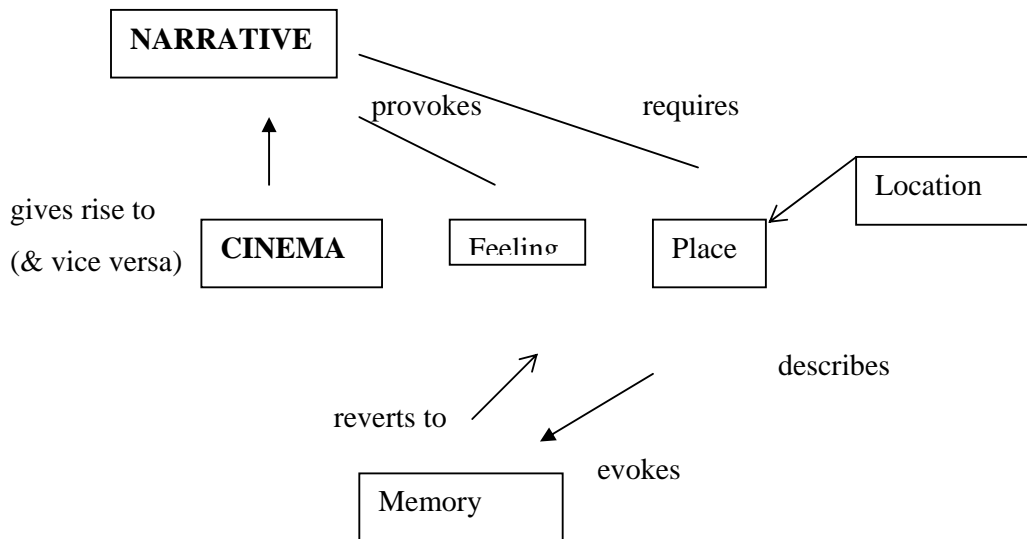


Figure Two – concept map extract showing some elementary concepts and their semantic relationships

4. Conceptual modelling

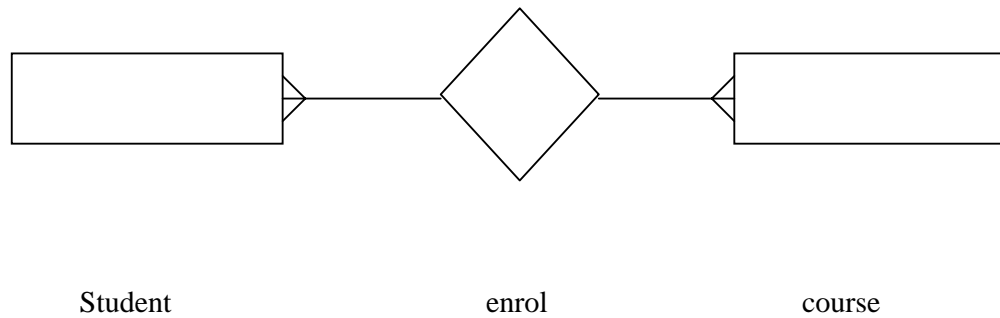
This approach is most closely associated with database modelling and information systems more generally. This operates at a level above data modelling and implementation commitments made in an information systems development, so is more directly comparable with the “knowledge level modelling” of other techniques.

The classic expression of the ideas was given by Chen (1976) and has evolved through various notations and variants (including the object oriented approach), with increasing recent attention being given to notions of ontology. Theoretically however these do not represent any conceptual advance over the epistemological position in Chen’s work other than minor refinements and the beginnings of engagement with inherent problems in the philosophically realist position.

Conceptual modelling aims to “capture the meaning of an application domain as perceived by someone” (Wand, Storey and Weber, 1999: 494). The essence of the conceptual modelling literature is best seen as evolution of Chen’s entity-relationship-

attribute formalism, or E-R diagram. Although these terms are nuanced and have specific meanings within ontological frameworks, broadly, this approach identifies *entities* (things, concepts), their *attributes* (which may also be concepts, and are sometimes known as weak entities or properties) and defines relationships among these which may be mandatory or optional, and which has cardinality, i.e. may be *one to one*, *one to many* or *many to many*. These concepts are readily seen from figure 3

(a)



(b)

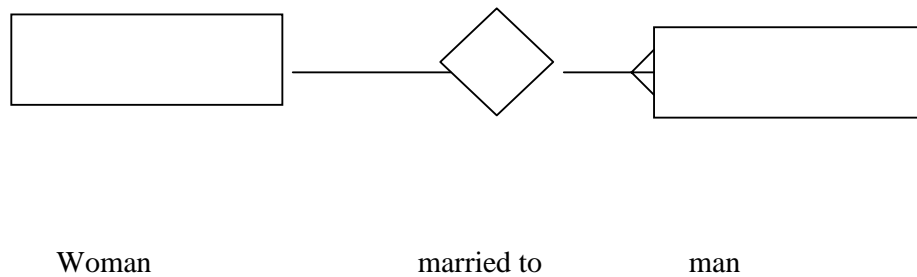


Figure Three. Entity relationship model (extracts)

The crow's feet show "many" instances possible for this relationship, so the interpretation of (a) above is that *many* students are enrolled on *many* courses (each student will typically do more than one course: each course will typically have more than one student). In (b) a polyandrous society is being described: one woman has many husbands: but each husband has only one wife. These forms begin to impose some formal semantics on a propositional statement. Some problems with these

approaches revolve around exception handling, rigour of concept definition, contentiously defined relationships, relationships which themselves have properties, and the context of applicability.

In the branding research we have results that suggest that our three structures of attention: nostalgia, aspiration and everyday life, can feature separately in an audience reading of several different films, or, all may occur in just one title. *Ordinary Heroes* (*Qian yan, wan yu*, Ann Hui, 1999), is a film which tells the story of political struggles in Hong Kong in the 1970s and 1980s, and which deals particularly with the struggle by Hakka Mainland workers for on-land residency and family rights. It is made in Hui's signature style of ficto-documentary and contains period detail as well as accounts of the ordinary harshness of everyday life. These activists are 'ordinary heroes', the 'voices of many'. The narrative follows, in flashback, the characters' struggles to live as good a life as that enjoyed by Hong Kong residents, and to that extent it is also a film about aspiration. The film is coded by respondents and by the researchers as nostalgic, aspirational and a film about everyday life. In a conceptual model, the reading would therefore look like this:

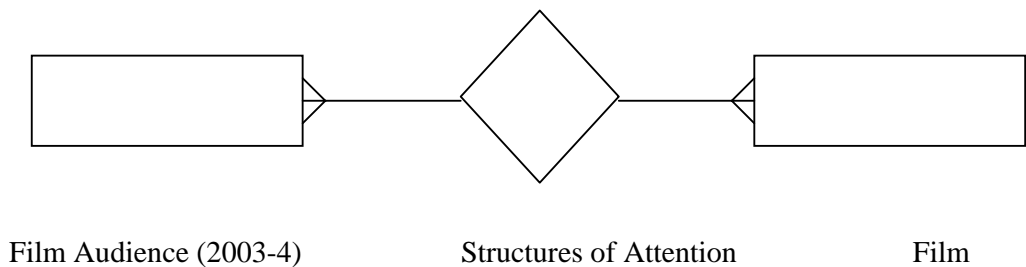


Figure Four: Structures of attention model

The crows feet indicate many points of view and (at least) three points of entry to interpretations of the film within the scope of the research project. To indicate that caveat we should perhaps encircle the diagram, although in so doing we would move away from the conditions of the model's original application, which is looking for relationships that fit a linear, computational outcome. Figure Four is of course a reductive model, it gives no detail of the film in question (its tone, mise en scène, subject matter) which might suggest why all three structures of attention are deemed appropriate to its affect. What it does do, however is proffer a simple starting point for

further discussions of the ways in which people understand film. It streamlines the cognitive approach, as the structures of attention already assume a complex network of experience, understanding and definition. Also, while it does not stress a phenomenological take on the link between lived experience and the body of the film, such a link is already active in the base idea of structures of attention. The model does not deny the complexities that it contains, rather it seeks to communicate one finding (that multiple structures of attention are likely to be in play in the reception of certain films), and thus suggest further avenues for discussion.

So, whilst in a mainstream Cultural or Film studies publication one might aim to describe these analytical findings in words (as we are now attempting!), we argue that there may be additional value in giving a conceptual form to the findings. This is partly the value of conceptual description at an introductory but also inherently sophisticated level, and partly the value that arises from a visualisation, which forces questions by virtue of the difficulty of imagining and creating a visual representation of something that is as yet poorly understood. In Hong Kong in late 2003, at one focus group held with audience members at the Hong Kong Film Archive, eight respondents were asked to give a numerical value (1-5) to the posited structures of attention. They did so as the summation of a series of conversations about Cantonese film, the visual characteristics of Hong Kong city (cinematic and actual), the relationship of the city and its residents, and the tone and feeling of Hong Kong as a lived experience. The numerical value that they gave to one or more structures of attention was indicative of how they experienced the city, but did not prove anything beyond that inference. We did note that the numbers were uniformly high (3 and above) suggesting that the structures of attention that we proposed made some sense to the respondents and that – whichever they chose to express it – they all had a strong engagement with the city.

The group was representative of an audience for a retrospective screening of the Cantonese director and comic actor Lao Dun's films. All the members of the group (bar one Singaporean) were born and raised in Hong Kong and were of Chinese ethnicity, but described their nationalities variously as British (1), Hong Kong (3), Chinese (3). A content analysis of the findings was unnecessary given the scale of the information, but nonetheless there were a number of observations that could be made that relied on trends and frequency of responses. The respondents over 40 years old (50%) talked about Hong Kong as a place with which they had deep affinity, and used

words such as ‘love’, belonging’ and ‘motherland’ to describe it. This group very quickly understood the tenor of our question when we asked them to describe the ‘character’ of the city. They offered reasonably complex character analyses: ‘cohesive and energetic, hilarious, cold, pragmatic, passive, selfish because it’s a family not a nation, materialistic, vigorous, adaptable and optimistic. (collated)’ They scored nostalgia and everyday life high (3-5), but nonetheless coded aspiration into their discursive descriptions of the city. Their responses were echoed by Hong Kong based film-makers who, when pressed to give us the key narrative of Hong Kong, across all genres and periods of film-making, resolved that the city’s story is of – making something out of nothing against the odds. We might code that as aspirational, but our direct questions to audiences suggest that it is a way of telling the city’s story that is so familiar that it is understood as nostalgic.

By contrast, the same question in Sydney, of a visiting film-maker and tourism strategists produced a definite bias towards ‘aspiration’. The reading of *Looking for Alibrandi* offered by one subject (Lewis, an American documentarist currently based in Brisbane but usually located in Hungary) was that the film was outstandingly successful as an aspirational tale about Sydney. He argued that aspiration was best summed up in the Sydney context as an ongoing narrative of the city as a place of contrasts, and where peace is only secured by putting one’s aspirations aside (as in *Alibrandi*), or in re-tuning them to non-mainstream values.

Amongst the aspiring protagonists, only one of them, Muriel in *Muriel’s Wedding*, is privy to the view of the harbour (bridge, opera house, boats and water) from their homes. The view is always a visual depiction of the very rich. This solitary status symbol is an underlying theme throughout all the films. But it is interesting to note that she is not satisfied with simply the view and wishes for more from Sydney, “the city of brides.” (Lewis, 2004)

Lewis was selected to work on the project in the capacity of a subject-researcher. He was invited to devote focussed time to the Sydney film aspect of the work and he was fully informed of the structures of attention, which we are attempting to map. He made his judgement about *Alibrandi* and *Muriel’s Wedding* based on twenty years as a professional film maker, his brief to watch at least fifty films set in Sydney and archived at the Sydney based Australian Film, Television and

Radio School, and four complete days staying in the city itself. This subject could make highly informed choices based on his professional expertise, but had no intimate knowledge of the city other than as a short-stop tourism destination. His input was valuable as he embodied the naïve professional in the Sydney context, viewing films which are more or less well known to Australian film-makers and audiences, but which had not been previously known to him. His ‘idea of the city’ was developed in situ through cinematic engagement and an immediate touristic experience.

5. Concept structuring

This is the approach that will be developed and extended in the current project. It has affinities with many of the other methods described, and has a long history of practical use. It has the advantage for management theorists, much of which associates with the literatures of marketing and advertising, of being informed by a psychological theory (Kelly, 1955), with an underpinning constructivist philosophy and associated method. The concepts can be elicited and mapped at different levels of abstraction, to provide the basis for further discussion and refinement, or as a suggestive representation of a focal area. In this case the technique can be applied to the thick data collected through the modelling methods described above, which have been applied in the context of focus groups and interviews.

Drawing on techniques used in other areas of psychology, concept structuring was used by Gammack and Young (1984) to model the conceptual structure of experts in a variety of specialised areas of knowledge. Bypassing the exacting requirements for database representation, “knowledge models” could be built as ‘intermediate representations’, or as part specifications for knowledge base systems. The conceptual structures elicited formed the basis of computable decision rules for these systems. Thus the approach has the power to leverage from the mapping of a construction to a basis for action.

Considerable work has gone into developing the repertory grid technique, which is also often used outside its original theoretical context. Some of the conceptual mapping representations described above may follow from its use on a single interviewee or on a group of interviewees. We illustrate its projected application with reference to film analysis. Normally a principled sampling technique in relation to an identified population of interest should apply, and the elements

should be theoretically referenced. We use three methods of selection for the films. Firstly, the non-film oriented researcher uses the method most likely to be used by an average tourist, searching out ‘something to watch’ through a movie database on the web. He would be deliberately straightforward, using our search terms: Hong Kong, Sydney, nostalgia / aspiration / everyday. Second, we take up titles suggested by contemporary film-makers in conversation about the same terms, or structures of attention. Thirdly, we look at films that are ‘insistent’ or ‘spontaneous’ in that we encounter them through the process of research. The *1:99* post SARS series comes into this category. Once the sample is collected, a random internal sample (wherein each film is termed an ‘element’) is taken for illustrative comparison. Applying the method of triads, three *constructs* are used to differentiate and relate the qualities and affinities pertinent to each film. We have already indicated that our ‘structures of attention’ can be used as the constructs through which a film can build its conceptual profile. Each film is scored on each construct, and eventually a unique profile emerges: a repertory grid.

This method is still untried in this project. We have yet to determine what features should cross-reference the *constructs* on the grid, and how to give comparative value to aesthetic choices in films. Our seeding work on colour (Gammack, 2004) suggests blocs of solid colour as a marker of the everyday (a strong feature of Sydney locations), whilst night-shoots, fast cutting, and red tones might indicate the nostalgic edge of a haunted city – Hong Kong. We could also suggest that film locations which concentrate on iconic views (in Hong Kong: the Harbour and the Peak; in Sydney: the Harbour and the Opera House) are coded as nostalgic pending other locational juxtapositions in the course of the film. The use of (database) conceptual modelling in a ‘structures of attention’ model is radical to both of the disciplinary areas involved, and hopefully provocative of our thesis. Our point here is merely to illustrate the methods in unfamiliar context, without dependence on our inquiry’s theoretical context prior to using them on the actual project data, where issues of theoretically informed choice and sample are addressed.

The Idea of the City

The modelling techniques presented here are the means to an end of collaboration through disciplinary translation. We began the research on the assumption that the

experience of film is, in part, a phenomenological engagement with place. Location and its treatment by the camera and editing team are essential to the development of narrative and to its emotional impact on the audience. In the two-hour traffic of a film there is a great deal to convey, and this tends to be achieved through the *story*, which relies on genre, typology, and location to bring depth and breadth to the treatment of the *plot*. We extrapolate from this that place value in film could act upon the place value of a tourism destination, and that the two might play off one another in supporting an idea of the city in the minds of residents and visitors. This hypothesis relies on an understanding of lived experience, which links intellectual understanding, cultural memory, sophisticated habits of spectatorship and consumption, with the development and growth of place identity. We are therefore suggesting research techniques that also draw on these factors in eliciting an idea of the city from those who use it and whose lives are embedded in its actual and represented in its cultural and commercial worlds.

Our first conclusion is that cross-disciplinary techniques allow both parties to pose questions in mutually decipherable ways, and to present them to each other and to a wider audience. An advantage of this particular collaboration is that it is building a visual vocabulary, which we can use in describing complex discipline specific ideas to professionals from outside the academy, whilst giving ourselves the means to transcribe their equally complicated relationships with the city into meaningful notations for our purposes. Secondly, we conclude that the deepest idea of a city resounds in its access to its own historical trajectory. This has been clear in the ways in which our structures of attention have made links between contemporary needs and longings and representations of historical experience as an explanation of the present, particularly where that present is traumatic. Films that use this narrational structure have been cited as exemplars of the ‘idea of the city’ in cinema. Finally, the elicitation techniques that we have discussed also remind us of disciplinary boundaries and of the internal strengths of cultural research. It emerges as a field peculiarly able to combine empirical data with philosophical reflection, and interpersonal interaction with social description. There is some value in reminding a brand manager, through diagrams that s/he can take away in his portfolio, that locally supported notions of history should not be forgotten in the search for a new logo. We would contend however that the real worth of cultural research that takes on the methods and motions of data management is that we begin to address the

structurations of thought that we share as city dwellers, professionals, and professional thinkers.

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