

## **Researching world audiences: The experience of a complex methodology**

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### **Abstract:**

This essay critically revisits the methods used in the 2003-4 *Lord of the Rings* international audience research project. We argue that its way of combining in its core implement, a complex questionnaire which eventually recruited almost 25,000 responses, a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions allowed the project to disclose what the film meant, and how it mattered to audiences in new and distinctive ways. Using in particular two sets of findings which emerged from the overall dataset – one relating to which audiences most enjoyed and valued the film, the other relating to patterns in cross-cultural responses – we show the particular ways the methods adopted allowed moves between quantitative and qualitative understandings. This discussion of methods is set within a reconsideration of debates about the apparent benefits of triangulation. We close by noting some limitations in the research, and suggesting ways future research might overcome those limitations.

**Keywords:** *Lord of the Rings*; audience research; quantitative and qualitative research; triangulation.

### **Introduction**

The 2003-4 *Lord of the Rings* project was a consciously ambitious attempt to mount the largest and widest audience and reception study yet attempted, of a film or any other cultural product. It was stimulated by a number of things. The first and most obvious was the opportunity created by Peter Jackson's films' release over three years. The 2001 release of the first part made it evident that this was going to be an international phenomenon. And it gave time for framing and designing an intervention that could time in with the release of the final part. A successful application to the UK's Economic and Social Research

Council gave us core funding, enabling us to publicise our plans to researchers in other countries, eventually creating a network of researchers in 18 countries. A second motivating prompt was a small event. In late 2001, and at the height of preparations for the invasion of Iraq, an unauthored email went viral across the world. A tag line 'Frodo Has Failed' led to an image, of President George Bush wearing a highlighted gold ring ... marking him as the 'Sauron' of our world. (See **Figure 1**, below.) This set off trains of thought about the ways in which a film of this kind, although in itself a fantasy, might become a means for thinking and debating public political events. A third, and quite different, prompt was our reading of Janet Wasko's (2001) *Dazzled By Disney*. This was a bravura attempt to gather responses from seventeen countries to the Disney phenomenon, but was in our judgement marred by methodological obstacles, which effectively built in a presumption of 'guilt' and downplayed the kinds of pleasures that Disney might offer. We wanted to design this research in order to be able to make real discoveries about people's responses to the film, and the significance they attached to it.



**Figure 1: Bush portrayed as Sauron (viral email attachment).**

This combination of motives put pressure on our methods; they needed to be manageable on a world scale, but also subtle enough to allow us to capture the complexities that we saw arising from the three questions which we put as our central goals:

1. How and why does film fantasy matter to different kinds of audiences?
2. How would audiences in different countries relate to a story that (a) is essentially 'English', (b) celebrates New Zealand 'primevalness', and (c) is made with money raised by Hollywood studio New Line Cinema?
3. How was the ground prepared for the film in different countries (by marketing and media)? How did different kinds of audiences respond to this prefiguration?

We said in our ESRC application that we hoped to find ways to explore how different receiving national cultures (a tricky term, at the best of times) played a role in people's

responses. This was an inevitably risky promise, given that we could not be sure how our methods of recruitment might alter national profiles of responses. Nonetheless, we made the commitment in the hope that sheer scale of responses, along with the internal checks that we could make, would permit us to make at least tentative claims. This promise came back to bite us, in the project’s final stages.

The principles underlying our invitation to researchers in other countries were pretty straightforward. For us in the UK, the project would have three parts: (a) a three-month period of intensive gathering of prefigurative materials (press, television, internet, radio, magazines, merchandising etc.), just prior to the final film’s release; (b) a complex questionnaire, web-mounted but also available on paper, which would become available from the first day of the release – with ambitions to recruit many thousands of completions; and (c) following closure and preliminary analysis of the questionnaire, follow-up interviews with individuals chosen for their exemplification of patterns emerging from the responses. But all that we asked international collaborators to sign up to, was the second phase. The questionnaire would be made available in as many languages as we had relevant research groups (we ended up operating in 14 languages); and they would find ways to publicise it in their respective countries. In return all participants would receive the complete world database of responses, for any use they wished to make of them. Any additional participation was entirely optional. In practice, most groups only operated in and around the questionnaire. In three countries (Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands), researchers linked this with wider plans of their own design.

At the heart of our methodology, then, was the questionnaire, which eventually recruited just under 25,000 responses. The design and operation of this is the focus of this essay. The questionnaire is attached in full as **Appendix 1**.

We want, however, to begin with two outcomes of the research – two Tables which we think demonstrate the nature of the value that our choice of methods brought with it. **Table 1** shows the relationship between the answers to three multiple-choice questions.

**Table 1:** Relations (%) between Extreme Enjoyment and Importance, and Modality Choices:

	<b>Extreme Enjoyment</b>	<b>Extreme Importance</b>		<b>Extreme Enjoyment</b>	<b>Extreme Importance</b>
Allegory	71.0	59.2	<i>Myth/Legend</i>	74.7	64.5
<i>Epic</i>	73.8	65.9	<i>Quest</i>	72.0	63.4
<i>Fairytale</i>	64.3	42.9	<i>SFX Film</i>	45.3	36.4
<i>Fantasy</i>	66.6	57.6	<i>Spiritual Journey</i>	80.3	71.2
<i>Game-world</i>	61.8	41.2	<i>Threatened homeland</i>	71.6	62.5
<i>Good vs evil</i>	71.2	61.2	<i>War story</i>	65.9	56.1

This Table reveals some highly patterned differences between people’s choices within our Kinds of Story list, and their answers to our Enjoyment and Importance questions. At the extremes, those nominating SFX Film, Game-world, or Fairytale are significantly less likely to attach extreme enjoyment and importance to the film, than those nominating Quest, Myth/Legend, or especially Spiritual Journey. Enjoyment is consistently scaled in relation to Importance, but in every case slightly higher. We return to the significance of this finding later, and what it enabled us to explore further.

**Table 2** is more complicated. It arose from our attempt, near the end of the project, to say something about patterns of national responses to the film. We did this by restricting our investigation to the twelve countries with the highest overall response-populations (ranging from the USA with 4,744, to Greece with exactly 500). In the course of repeatedly searching the database, gradually delimiting variables and reinvestigating the resultant groups, this curious Table emerged.

**Table 2:** Proportion of Overlap by Country between Overall Populations of Maximum Pleasure/Importance, and That Country’s Modality Choice Most Associated with Maximal Pleasure and Importance (in Rank Order)

	<b>Top Pleasure/Importance Population [a]</b>	<b>Also nominating Top Modality Associated with Pleasure/Importance [b]</b>	<b>Proportion of [b] to [a]</b>	<b>Top Engaged Modality Choice</b>	<b>Most Common Modality Choice</b>
China	342	254	74.3	Epic	Fantasy
France	337	208	61.7	Epic	Epic
Belgium	614	369	60.1	Quest	Quest
Netherlands	1507	746	49.5	Quest	Fantasy
Slovenia	301	133	44.2	Epic	Good vs. evil
United States	3313	1193	36.0	Spiritual journey	Epic
Australia	323	108	33.4	Spiritual journey	Epic
Greece	223	69	30.9	Spiritual journey	Epic
United Kingdom	1609	480	29.8	Spiritual journey	Epic
Spain	641	148	23.1	Spiritual journey	Epic
Denmark	606	119	19.6	Spiritual journey	Good vs. evil
Germany	624	84	13.5	Spiritual journey	Epic

We offer a brief explanatory commentary on the dimensions summarised in this Table. The purpose here was to meet our commitment to explore patterns of cross-cultural response – something which our initial ESRC bid had promised, and which we believed our methods could facilitate. The first column, then, derives from the combined results of two of our Likert-type scales, the first of which asked people how much they enjoyed the film, the second asking how important it was to see it (see **Appendix 1** for full details on this). The figures shown are the totals in each country for those giving the highest responses to each (Extremely Enjoyable and Important). The second column displays the numbers of those in the first column who also chose what was, for each country, the most widely chosen ‘modality choice’ – that is, the twelve options we offered for ways of describing the *kind of story* people felt *The Lord of the Rings* is (again, see **Appendix 1** for the full list of these). The third column expresses the relations between columns 1 and 2, as percentages. The fourth then names the modality choice associated, by country, with Extreme Enjoyment and Importance; and the fifth names for comparison each country’s most commonly nominated modality choice. It is the relationship between columns 3-5 which particularly fascinated us. What it appears to show is that there is some patterned relationship between the degree to which a specialist population of responses has emerged in any country, and the top choices for Kind of Story. We return later to why this fascinated us, and what it enabled us to proceed to do.

### **Designing the Core Questionnaire**

The materials in these Tables were obtainable because of the questionnaire’s design. This design was indeed the pivot of the project. Needing to recruit large numbers of completions to be effective, ideally with large clusters from a good number of countries (to allow comparisons), we recruited opportunistically, simply by publicising it by every means we could think of. Mainly completed online, there were also in several countries good attempts to recruit responses outside cinemas showing the film. We were confident that the overall design and structure of the questionnaire would enable us to identify patterns, clusters, relationships and separations if the overall response level was sufficient. We did not set ourselves a target for completions, simply telling ourselves that the larger and wider the spread, the more we would be able to do with them all. In other words, putting it crudely, our aim was to generate the largest and richest body of data and materials that we could achieve in a limited time (in the end five months), and then to work to the maximum with whatever this amounted to. In the end we obtained 24,739 responses (of which 2,253 were paper-completed), with concentrations of over 500 in twelve countries.

To obtain the British funding for the project, we had to explain our key methodological proposals to the ESRC. The heart of these was that the questionnaire would combine quantitative and qualitative questions, in some very particular ways. The overarching principle was that we would ask respondents to place themselves into categories of various kinds, but then to tell us in their own words what those categories meant to them. But this clearly had to work within certain restrictions and difficulties. First, length. Because

we wanted to be able to produce paper-versions, in all languages, for colleagues around the world hopefully to use, we restricted its overall length to what could be managed on two sides of an A4 sheet of paper, while leaving reasonable space for people to write their own words in response to qualitative questions. We illustrate shortly one decision which resulted from this. Second, translation. Our online version offered the questionnaire in 14 languages. This was a challenge in itself, as we will see. Certain words which posed no problems in English turned out to be surprisingly tricky in particular languages. One opening example illustrates the *kind* of problems we encountered. One question asked people to say where, in their imagination, they saw Middle-earth to be. In Scandinavian languages, 'Middle-earth' translates as 'Midgard' – which is of course the name in Norse myths for the home of the Gods. Our response to this particular issue was to say that, actually, this just is the case. Tolkien, entering Sweden, Denmark and Norway, encountered a culture with certain ideas and concepts already in place, and these could well be conditioning features in responses.

### **Quantitative questions**

Working within restrictions such as these, the questionnaire's design had particular jobs to do. Not all questions played the same role, by any means. Decisions about some were easy, other were surprisingly tricky. And to be truthful, not all our decisions were ultimately equally effective. At one end were the few demographic questions. These were placed near the end of the questionnaire, as we wanted people to come to them having felt that they were being invited to speak from individual interests and expertise, rather than as representatives of categories. Age and sex posed few problems (and because our topic was morally uncontentious, we had no ethical issues about recruiting under-18 respondents). We decided early on that we would not seek to ask people's sexual orientation. But ethnicity could have been a relevant dimension to explore. In reviews of Parts 1-2 of the trilogy, there were a number of critical commentaries on the use of Maori actors to represent the corrupted Orcs. It could have been relevant, therefore, to try to explore how people's perceptions of their ethnicity related to awareness of these issues. In the end, we chose not to try to include this. The idea of coming up with a usable list of ethnicities for a worldwide survey defeated us utterly, but asking people to nominate their own would surely have generated a mass of unusably different responses.

But we very much wanted to include a question which would allow us in some way to explore the operations of 'cultural capital' as a dimension of responses. We were very aware, both from general knowledge, and from our attention to debates around the books and then the first two films, that Tolkien's cultural status, and indeed that of 'fantasy' as a genre, were much contested. It was, we felt, impossible to ask people their class-membership directly, nor could we come up with an income scale applicable to worldwide responses. Our solution was to construct a list of 12 *kinds of occupation*, and to ask people to nominate the one which was closest to their own situation. This to us had the advantage that it might also tap into people's *attitudes* towards their work (for instance a teacher

might class him/herself as a professional, as a creative worker, or even as an administrative worker – the choice would say something important about how they felt about their work). Indirectly, we felt this could allow us to explore the relations between class position and kinds of response to *Lord of the Rings*, and thus to engage with the kinds of debate centred on researchers like Pierre Bourdieu (to which we return shortly). Inasmuch as we received feedback on the questionnaire, this did seem to be accepted as reasonable.

The second set of quantitative questions were our measures of audiences' responses. Coming at the very beginning of the questionnaire, these were paired. We first asked people to place themselves along two Likert-type scales, for Enjoyment, and for Importance. With each, we asked them to say in their own words what they meant by these self-allocations. If we are honest, the more open form of Question 2 (for Enjoyment) proved more beneficial than Question 4's listing style. (We asked people to limit their responses to 100 words, for fear that people would say all that they felt in one answer – a request which some found frustrating, as here: "Only 100 words? I'm pretty confident that the dictionary doesn't even contain all the words needed to sum up my response to the film. I was awed though. It was a masterpiece on so many levels. The characterization. The effects. The battles. The dialogue. The spatial settings. Incredible!") The first question allowed us to build up what we would call 'languages of appreciation and evaluation', and to explore how these were used. This proved valuable when we came to consider in detail how the idea of 'fantasy' was understood by different kinds of audience (see Barker, 2007).

The third and in the end most important pair of questions was constructed around what we would call 'vernacular categories'. From our working knowledge of *Lord of the Rings*, its history, reputation and debates, we constructed a list of twelve ways in which people might name the *kind of story* it is (see Question 5 in **Appendix 1**). Respondents were then asked to choose up to three which came closest to their own sense of the film's story-world. This raised a particular set of issues about translation. In Chinese, for instance, it is hard to produce a distinction between 'allegory', and 'myth/legend'. Our solution for the online questionnaire was to attach one-sentence explanations of what we understood by the terms, which anyone uncertain could refer to by hovering the cursor over a term. Those using the paper questionnaires had sheets with the definitions to hand, for anyone to refer to (one of us had direct experience of being asked by the mother of an 11-year old boy who was lying on the floor outside a cinema completing the questionnaire, to explain the term 'myth' – the boy was apparently satisfied, and happily ticked the box! Of such moments are real researches made ...). But the results of this (and its partner-question, which asked where in people's imagination Middle-earth was to be found) were invaluable. We were able to map overall spreads of choices across the world, then to separate and compare spreads by country, language, age, sex, and occupation. We created a Venn-type diagram of relations among the (variably sized) 12 categories, showing which kinds of vernacular meaning were strongly or weakly interrelated (see **Figure 2**, below). We could then for instance explore the relations between all these, and people's indicated levels of enjoyment and importance.



**Figure 2: Venn-type Diagram of Relations among Vernacular Categories.<sup>1</sup>**

This led to **Table 1** (see above), which contains what we might regard as among the most significant findings of the entire project. Across the world, those responding with the highest degrees of both Enjoyment and Importance to the film were substantially more likely to choose Spiritual Journey than any other category. Because of the design of our questionnaire, having found this very strong association, we were able then to explore what people *meant* by this choice (and we were able also to select for interview, in the UK, people making these choices, to explore these meanings in depth). We broadly concluded that choice of Spiritual Journey meant that the films, and Tolkien’s books (for this group proved to include a high proportion of repeat-readers), were associated with high levels of perceived moral import – which people were happy to call a ‘spiritual journey’ but almost with the benefit of it having few if any theological implications. This group also showed one other striking tendency, to what we came to call ‘strategic forgetting’. In order to intensify their experience of the journeys involved in the story, even though in almost all cases they knew very well what would happen, they were able to set aside that knowledge and read or watch *as though they couldn’t be sure of the outcome* of each hard decision characters made.

All these further findings were made possible by moving from the quantitative results to the grouped responses to qualitative questions within our database (and, for the final finding, it must be said, to the follow-up interviews with selected individuals). It is to these qualitative questions we next turn.

### **Qualitative questions**

As with the quantitative, our qualitative questions performed several distinct functions. Their overarching goal was to encourage people to talk at length, and in their own words, about their responses to Tolkien’s story-world. It was thus crucial to us to use ordinary language, to make people feel comfortable and welcomed, and to ensure them that they had experience and expertise that we valued. It was vital that no one should feel judged, or

that any view of the film was being presumed or privileged. This idea of transferring expertise to audiences is, to us, a component within a long tradition, definitely part of the cultural studies approach, but with deeper roots back into hermeneutic traditions, with their challenge to administrative and policy conceptions of audience research. For us, the gain would be the acquiring of large amounts of open talk, organised and stored in connection with people's quantitative self-positionings, and therefore researchable in relation to those. As such, we took as guideline Janet Staiger's observation (made in the margin of a discussion of Ian Angus' comments on audiences' 'right to be heard') that to listen to audiences' own explanations of their pleasures is not only a necessity if one wants to avoid relegating a questionnaire to the level of an interrogation, but it also coins a firm unit of measurement: talk itself becomes the carrier of meaning (Staiger 2005: 4).

Within this overarching intent, there were several more particular purposes. First, we wanted to hear what people meant by making certain scaled or categorical choices. If a person gave the film very high ratings, what languages of commendation did they use – and, if they went on to tell us, what particular features of the films were associated with such praise?

Second, certain questions were included because experience on previous projects had taught us that they were likely to capture people's *operative criteria* as they engaged with and judged the film. This had first come into view in a 1995 project to study audience responses to the Sylvester Stallone vehicle *Judge Dredd* (Danny Cannon, 1994) – a film which turned out to disappoint and frustrate many of its viewers. In particular, those audiences who drew their criteria from previous experience of the British comicbook, *2000AD*, in which the character Dredd and his world originated, were likely to express irritation at changes from the version they knew. Sometimes these could seem trivial – Dredd in the original never removed his helmet, Dredd in the film did – but sometimes what audience talk revealed were deeper criteria about the nature of the story-world. The *Dredd* research entirely used focus groups, and of course the dynamics of talk are significantly different in those. Equally, however, because of its restriction to focus groups, we were not able to go beyond painting portraits of particular positions; we could not map their presence more broadly. With suitably phrased questions in a widely-recruiting questionnaire, we hoped to be able to combine drawing out the mini-ideals which set the terms of people's judgements, and at the same time identify what kinds of people these were, and how their ideals might fit into their broader cultural landscapes.

An illustration may help here. The final questionnaire included a question asking people to tell us who their favourite character was, and why. This question was not included in our draft. However, when we piloted the questionnaire with our own students<sup>2</sup>, to check for points of ambiguity and unclarity, a consistent response was that people wanted to tell us about character choices. It became clear that it was important to include this, because of our commitment to speaking to audiences in the language of their own interests. The price however was the removal of another question we had hoped to ask, for reasons of length (especially when translated into paper versions). But our pilot audience

proved correct. A sequence of searches allowed us to isolate samples of people choosing a series of characters, to locate the criteria which guided their choices, and what this led them particularly to pay attention to in the film, and then finally to say what kinds of people these were on our demographic measures.

The third purpose behind some of our qualitative questions was to open doors to other aspects of people's cultural position and how the film fitted into this. So, for instance, Question 12 asked people to talk about the social relations of watching the film, while Question 13 asked them if there was anything importantly idiosyncratic about their relations to Tolkien and his world.

### **Quantitative/Qualitative and Triangulation Issues**

It is in the relations that we enacted between the quantitative and qualitative aspects of our research that the most interesting issues arise. Discussions about the benefits and limitations of combining research methods – and in particular of crossing the quantitative/qualitative divide – have a long lineage, and in many research fields. This is hardly the place to try to review the general state of these debates. But particular aspects of it concern and intrigue us. First, there is the widespread assumption – challenged at particular moments – that generally we should look for *knowledge benefits* from adopting multimethod approaches. Particular studies which have clearly benefited are cited as evidence for this general position. Yet it surely must be the case that if the methods are genuinely separate from each other, they might produce contradictions, confusions and increased unclarity as much as they might confirm, strengthen and coordinate with each other.

The second assumption – again contested in some places – is that the key benefit of using multimethods is an increase in confidence in findings. Frequently, writers on multimethod research cite increases in validity as its main gain. And in this, the concept of 'triangulation' enters to play an important role. With its sources in navigation, this concept appears to promise greater security in locating and identifying phenomena.<sup>3</sup> Again, we want to query whether this is, or should be, the goal of adopting multiple methods, whether quantitative or qualitative or a combination.

The third issue concerns the way the history of discussions in this area tends to be told. A 'line of descent' is traced, frequently beginning with Campbell & Fiske (1959), then running through Webb et al. (1966), Smith (1975) and Denzin (1978) to a more recent proliferation of kinds of multimethod research and a range of modes of triangulation. This is not so much untrue as simply inadequate. It misses some very important features, which indeed throw light back on the first two assumptions.

It can be something of a revelation to read Campbell and Fiske's 1959 essay closely<sup>4</sup>, and to realise that the problems that they were aiming to resolve, through developing a kind of triangulation (and they only use the word once), were sharply at odds with those of subsequent scholars. Campbell and Fiske position themselves very clearly within a psychometric trait-psychology, of the kind which was in this period generating standardised

tests for such things as ‘leadership quality’. Their problem was that different tests were producing variant and inconsistent outcomes. The purpose of their meta-survey was to propose ways to sort issues of reliability of *method* from reliability of *results*. There is not a trace of interest within their argument in crossing the quali/quantitative divide – this was strictly part of American mainstream psychology’s thrust to build secure, trustworthy implements for social intervention.

This is important to recall, as it frames their interest in triangulation in several ways. It drives the *kinds of question* that procedures such as triangulation might resolve. It positions their work within a distinct *research paradigm* (and by the use of this term, we intend to refer not just to concepts and procedures, but also to the institutional relationships within which these operate). And arising from these, it determines the *kinds of benefit sought*. ‘Triangulation’ at its source was never just a new method, it was a solution to a business problem.<sup>5</sup>

But the second phase of triangulation’s history went elsewhere. Webb et al.’s (1966) *Unobtrusive Methods* – to which Campbell contributed – arose from a period in which radical challenges had made many social scientists acutely aware of the effects of the act of research itself. Social science could alter the things it studied, in the very act of researching them. This study proposed a range of ways that social scientists could get round this, by *not being noticed researching*. But that involved doing research from a distance, circling as it were round its ‘objects’. For Webb et al., therefore, the purpose of multimethod research and of triangulation of results was to add together perspectives that were each of necessity limited.

This was also the period in which qualitative research was struggling in the States to break through the dismissive attitude of quantitative researchers<sup>6</sup>, and to formulate its own methodological procedures for determining strengths and weaknesses, leading most famously to the emergence of Grounded Theory, which emphasised the slow production and provisionality of theory. But by the 1970s, this was combining with a larger philosophical development, broadly known as social constructionism, or the belief that all knowledge – including the most academic – is socially structured, and all problems, concepts and theories value-laden. This heady combination showed itself in two pieces of work in particular: Denzin’s (1970) *The Research Act*, and Smith’s (1975) *Strategies of Social Research*. What distinguished these works was their attempt to lay down a structured and systematic account of various kinds of triangulation. So Denzin, famously, distinguished four modes: theoretical, investigator, data, and methodological. The first edition of his book proposed that triangulation should be seen as a tool for increasing validity.<sup>7</sup> But sharp criticisms from radical constructionists led him to revise later editions to a more perspectival position, suggesting that the main gains to be had from multimethod research were two-fold: such research should make clear that all perspectives are limited, biased, and positional; by multiplying them, then, we will not be seeing a ‘truth’ emergent, but rather consciously relativising all such perspectives.

The rising emphasis on research training which has characterised all areas of research over the last thirty years has seen a steady increase (into the hundreds) in publication of books on research methods, just about all of which include discussions of multimethod research, many of them marked by high levels of advocacy. Flick (1992) provides a valuable reconsideration of the state of the field, in particular taking into account the rise of methods such as conversation analysis, which have bid for status as rigorous qualitative methodologies. (A large chunk of Flick's essay is a presentation of the methods and findings of his own multimethod research into counsellor-client trusts in psychiatric services.) Even so, that has left it notably unclear what range of uses have actually been tried, and how far actual use of such multimethods produces real benefits. In 2006, Alan Bryman published a meta-study of 232 social science essays published between 1994-2003, comparing and contrasting rationales given for combining quantitative and qualitative research with actual practices. Bryman notes in particular quite low levels of specification of distinct questions for the quantitative and qualitative parts of research projects. His conclusion – that multi-strategy research is a 'moveable feast' – seems a rather kindly way of saying that often its rhetorical uses are greater than its substantive achievements.

But Bryman makes one judgement with which we strongly disagree. He argues that among the weakest modes of multimethod research is that which combines approaches within one implement. Bryman writes (p. 103):

... some methodologists might argue that a combination of quantitative and qualitative data based on the administration of one research instrument does not represent a true integration of quantitative and qualitative research because one will tend to be subordinate to the other.

It is clearly *possible* that one method will be subordinate to the other, but we do not accept that it is an inevitable feature of research design. We would also argue that the effectiveness of the combination must be a function of the procedures of analysis followed.

### **Mapping Imagined Worlds**

What this mini-history suggests to us is that multimethod, quali/quantitative and triangulative research should not be seen to have a single, fixed purpose. The risks are that the benefits of combining methods will be taken as self-evident, and determinable prior to and independently of a clear statement of the purposes of a particular piece of research. And that requires clear reference to the paradigm within which the research is conceived and undertaken. We take the challenge posed in here very seriously even if, being strictly honest, some of our thinking about this is post-hoc.

So, how might we position our own research, and its use of cross-qualiquantitative methods, in relation to the three dimensions we have identified: the kinds of question posed; the constitutive research paradigm; and the perceived benefits from the methodology? Our research questions were clearly positioned within what we might call an

updated and expanded cultural studies frame. The cultural studies tradition, from its beginnings, emphasised (in opposition to the American mass communication tradition) that cultural products such as films are not message-vehicles, to be assessed for their lesser or greater 'effect', but complexly organised bodies of meaning, which draw on and react back onto their constitutive culture. They are also to be understood in terms of their relations to power, and to wider hierarchically-organised structures of taste and cultural value. But what audience research had added to this frame, as time went by, was a realisation of the risks of cultural analysts claiming to disclose 'the meaning' of things like films, and thence imputing modes of participation and imbrication onto 'the audience'. We therefore started from a critical position towards Stuart Hall's dominant encoding/decoding model. We also saw that in important ways audience research had run up against a barrier. Most audience researches went in one of two directions: either celebrating simple diversity and variety of responses; or following fascinations with particular groups' responses (be they women, children, fans, or whoever).

Influenced by Bourdieu's questions (if less by his particular answers), our research questions thus set the ambition to gather sufficient responses to the film in a form which would allow us to *map* overall patterns of responses, by country, by age, by class, by sex, but also – at least to some degree – by imagined community. Bourdieu emphasised that all cultural forms have to be understood by relation to their place within cultural taste hierarchies. These, he argued, shape the form of the 'text', the systems into which it is placed, and the manners of its consumption. Tolkien's work, we believed, was insistently middle-brow. Lacking the formal complexities and requirements for specialist training that 'literature' requires, it does in the other direction not seem explicable in terms of the *sensuous immediacy* that Bourdieu sees as characterising low culture. But – and here Bourdieu's tidy schemata get challenged – there is, for some of Tolkien's followers, an immense seriousness which discovers and delights in complexities in the story that other readers and viewers simply do not see. If Tolkien is middle-brow (and that is certainly the basis of his scornful rejection by many literary scholars), it is in some way because his story manages to straddle art-worlds. Recognising these complexities, to us, was a precondition of being able to design and conduct this research.

Our audiences' seriousness of engagement with Tolkien's story-world (their desire to make mobile and turn this otherwise imprecise in-between position of middle-browness, not just to satisfy pre-existing needs but, rather, to use it as a guide on a shared 'journey' towards new cultural insights, whatever they would be) also challenges Bourdieu's views on the choices of practitioners of culture, in particular his distinction between choices of necessity and choices of freedom or luxury (Bourdieu 1986: 178; also see Swartz 1997: 168). In this distinction Bourdieu follows a long tradition of understanding social and cultural behaviour against a standard (norm) of an elite (imagined or real), whereby much cultural practice of those outside the elite is either seen as 'desiring' or 'mimicking' that elite (in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, William Stanley Jevons had used the term 'aping'), and hence either demonstrative of an effort to move outside one's cultural position, or else as locked into its

position because it feels inevitable. What we found was somewhat different. When we separated, like Bourdieu, subsets of the overall pool of respondents by focusing on one discriminating variable that we felt came to the front in qualitative questions (the name of one region, or one specific modality or a particular story-world), our audiences showed an engagement with these processes in a far less deterministic way than was expected – but equally so one that was anything but playful. That is to say, they embarked upon these journeys in order to experience the process itself. This was not merely playful – it was far too steeped in seriousness for that – nor was it either a conscious or unconscious (so far as we could tell) strategy towards a social goal. The manner of experience itself, the ability to partially steer the process of giving meaning and then – for stretches – be led by the consequences (real or imagined) of that choice, and then to take charge of the reins again as it were, was, we found often described as ‘creative’ – not inconsequential or frivolous, because it came with a self-perceived responsibility to ‘argue’ one’s case or to ‘stand up’ for one’s choice – but creative in a constructive fashion. No surprise, perhaps, that for these audiences the Bush=Sauron image was often more a tool than a joke.

Let us briefly mention two examples of these processes that our audiences undertook. The first example concerns audiences who had self-selected their occupation as ‘Creative’. These were by 15% more likely to link their kind of enjoyment of the films (which they generally rated extremely high – among the highest of all occupation categories) to seeing the films as a ‘Spiritual Journey’. While it makes sense instinctively to agree that audiences who regard their professional activity as creative would also work ‘creatively’ with the meanings of *The Lord of the Rings*, our research method allowed us to see exactly how these processes occurred, and how degrees of seriousness and aesthetic engagement were balanced with other concerns (such as excitement and fannish adoration). Only because we had access, through the qualitative questions in the questionnaire, to lots of open talk by these audiences were we able to sketch this process, and to discover that the space in between Bourdieu’s distinctive typologies consisted of much more than an ‘affective nebula’ (to borrow Michel Maffesoli’s term), and that quite particular mechanisms of meaning-making were in operation. Mathijs (2004) suggests that the precise nature of these mechanisms could perhaps be identified according to cognitive schemata (such as the ones used by David Bordwell for film interpretation), but that in each case these needed to be grounded precisely within the context of the self-positioning of audiences (something which Bordwell and many cognitivists never do).

The second example involved a specific section of the overall pool of respondents, namely those that had mentioned ‘New Zealand’ in response to the question ‘Where, and when, is Middle-Earth for you?’ At the extreme poles of the use of the term lay audiences who insisted either that, truly, Middle-Earth was literally New Zealand, or that Middle-Earth was pure fantasy. In between these extremes we found two striking patterns. The first was of audiences who referenced ‘New Zealand’ only to subsequently, and often within the same sentence, distance themselves from their assertion (snippet examples include ‘Well I think of New Zealand but of course I know that it’s just an escape’, or ‘New Zealand! Just

kidding...’ Barker and Mathijs 2007: 119). We called this process one of ‘performing over-involvement’. The second pattern showed audiences who employed the term ‘New Zealand’ as one that allowed them to explore understandings of ‘home’ and ‘utopia’: abstract concepts which they felt the film addressed but which were somewhat out of reach. For these audiences, ‘New Zealand’ became a tool for exploring mobility in between otherwise discrete cultural positions, entertaining that mobility partially in a frivolous manner, but also with a serious investment in the consequences of the meaning-making enterprise. Both patterns, we noted, required audiences to ‘distance themselves slightly’ from the experience of the film (ibid). Again, this might appear an intuitively obvious process, but our methodology of combining quantitative and qualitative dimensions in our questionnaire allowed us to demonstrate exact nature of the process, in detail, while preserving both the semantic (the mental process) and material (the situation under which they occurred) characteristics of the operation.

### **Ancillary Materials**

To these largely Bourdieuan concerns of cultural alignment and affection we wanted to add another altogether different dimension which had been emerging both in our own thinking and more widely within film studies, namely, an interest in the ways ancillary materials – news, reviews, gossip, leaks, publicity, posters, merchandising, etc, etc – work in complicated ways, and with different groups of people, to steer, influence, or create emergent frames for receiving and affiliating with a film such as *Lord of the Rings*. These local histories become part, of course, of the larger historical frames within which Tolkien’s work has been set. To study audience responses to the film, then, was to dip our toes into a point in time, and hope to catch a *sense of the movements*. What was Tolkien currently *worth*? What value attached to fantasy at this point in time? What could filmed fantasy enable audiences to feel, and to think? It is not obvious how research can answer these kinds of questions.

A key problem we faced was set by wider institutional frames. Cultural studies has been described as a ‘baggy monster’. And in many respects this is true. There are very many routes into it, many preferred theorists, philosophical standpoints, interests and subject-inputs. And while there are plenty of conferences, journals, and debating fora, there are few networks within which people plan joint research – especially for discussing the methodological state of play. This meant that, when we put out our call for people interested in joining us in the project, there were few established international routes for this, and we could not expect high levels of agreement on specific methodological moves. Backgrounds, training, skills vary wildly (and we readily admit our own weaknesses in a number of areas). Sonia Livingstone has written interestingly on the problems in participating in international research projects, but our experience does not entirely concur with hers. Livingstone focuses on the theoretical problems in the concept of ‘national audiences’ (including the risks of treating nations as units for analysis, and the problem of clashes between local concepts and understandings), but also talks movingly of the sheer

problems of managing cross-national research. We suspect our experience was different for several reasons. First, we were not conducting policy-driven research, where contexts of reception carry quite definite imprimaturs. Second, our research design was precisely intended to take account of the ways in which local meanings might play a role within responses. Third, our core questionnaire – by its design – allowed us to *make a question* of the extent to which ‘nations’ constitute a unit, rather than presuming that it was. In this sense, our investigation into the role that ‘New Zealand’ played in audiences’ imagination was an example of that questioning.

Despite a fascinating conference on methodology hosted by our colleagues in Potsdam in 2003, it remained true that the conception and design of the core questionnaire, although debated within the international team, remained mostly our responsibility. So, what benefits did we see arising from its combination of methods in the one implement? It was certainly not an effort to increase validity. It was not with the intention of achieving a multiperspectival overview of the nature of the film. Rather, we hoped that this implement would allow us simultaneously to *locate patterns*, and to *disclose their internal semantic organisation*. It was the ability to move back and forth within the database, tagging and separating groups quantitatively and then comparing their qualitative responses, or moving from searching the database for mentions to classifying these into kinds, and then working back to the quantitative self-categorisations associated with those kinds, which both appealed to us and has proved the most beneficial.

Which brings us back to **Table 2**. This Table, to us, reveals a pattern which could only have been found via this kind of research. It shows that there is a broad relationship between the nature of the community of viewers in these twelve countries, and the pattern of choices of labels for the film. Crudely, the greater the degree of separation between those nominating that vernacular category most associated with highest Enjoyment and Importance, and the vernacular category most widely chosen in that country, the more likely it is that in that country this pair of vernacular categories will be Spiritual Journey, and Epic. The less the separation, or the greater the overlap, of these groups, the less likely this pairing will result – instead, rather random pairings emerge.

The meaning of this pattern was not self-evident. We proposed the following interpretation. We postulated that what we were seeing was the outcome of a process resulting from the length of time Tolkien’s work had been in significant circulation in different national contexts. Where it had been available for a longish time, there had been opportunities for a *specialist sensibility* to emerge which takes Tolkien very seriously, and for those people raises his work above purely narrative interests. His work takes on moral, if not ‘religious’, overtones. But in the other direction, a ‘mainstream’ response to his work emerges, which simply emphasises the wide reach of the story, without imputing wider moral meanings to it: hence ‘Epic’ as the underlying connector among all other labels (see **Figure 2** above).

In one essay in the project’s main book (Barker & Mathijs, 2007), one of us explored this possible explanation, by analysing and comparing randomised samples of the talk

associated with these vernacular choices in each of the twelve countries. The results were not tidy, by any means. Rather than either supporting or challenging the hypothesis, what they did, at best, was to show further what the hypothesis *might mean*.

The key point here is the iterative process involved in doing this. **Table 1** pointed us first to a striking association between high levels of engagement with the film, and the idea of a Spiritual Journey. The overall Venn-type Diagram showed that Epic constituted a sort of background state across the world responses. Using these two discoveries, it became possible, because of the database's design and scale, to mount a sequence of further more detailed searches. When **Table 2** emerged, and a possible understanding of its meaning was suggested, it became possible to conceive a further series of interrogations of our materials, to see what was going on within these findings. This we think is what may be distinctive here. Earlier, we noted that in the history of discussions of multimethod and triangulated research several different kinds of benefit have been conceived: strengthening validity where implements are proving unreliable; additive value where research has to be conducted 'at a distance'; and emphasising relativity of perspectives by contrasting accounts. We realise in retrospect that we may have been doing something rather different. Our goal was none of the above, but to hold materials in sufficient quantity and complexity that we could carry out sequenced investigations and analyses in order, gradually, to isolate and identify patterns, tendencies, and contrasts; and then be able to explore how these work as actual cultural positions. Each level of findings can thus generate new questions and opportunities for investigations.

### **Framing our research**

One final set of thoughts. A good deal of this essay has necessarily concerned itself with what might seem the detail of the questionnaire – its motives, design and operation. That might seem to underplay issues of theory and conceptualisation in this kind of research. We return to some of these now – and to one incomplete trajectory. A good deal of what we have written here, is only fully sayable in retrospect. Some of the issues we discuss here were primarily intuited as we designed and conducted the project in 2003-4. What we said earlier about our relations to the debates about triangulation is an example of this. But in retrospect we can see ways in which the whole conception of the *Lord of the Rings* project is rooted in a particular moment of a much longer tradition of thinking that goes back to the early hermeneutic sociologists, to the emergence of the sociology of knowledge, to the critical theorists of the 1930s onwards, and to more recent attempts to state what is the *purpose* of cultural investigation. This form of enquiry is not just one distinctive questionnaire, but a *kind* of enquiry.

To explain this point by comparison: in mainstream American psychology (including work in the psychology of entertainment), there is a long tradition of attempting to develop standardised research implements. These are sought not simply for convenience, but because it is believed that underpinning human behaviour and attitudes are a number of significant (probably biologically-driven) universal systems of response. If research could

locate these reliably, with an implement that could then be used repeatedly, then the *consequences* of those universal tendencies, and the *possibilities of intervening to modify their operation*, could be tracked. The drive towards developing these is therefore not just a methodological device, but the result of an ontological commitment, with its own distinctive concepts (and a key one is the concept of an 'attitude').

Our research stands elsewhere. Situated locally within a cultural studies tradition, but more broadly within a critical hermeneutic tradition (but one which has not given up on empirical research and retreated to relativistic circles), we believe that human responses to the world are culturally constructed and oriented, historically framed, and are the sources for people's desires and actions. In enquiring into *The Lord of the Rings*, then, we were aiming to understand how and why, at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this story was exciting many people, generating debates, and providing a space for thinking about the world and its future. The design of the questionnaire, and our stepped procedures for analysing the 25,000 responses to it, were ontologically connected to this overall programme. How?

There is, within the sociology of culture and knowledge, a long tradition which has sought to examine cultural situations for the operation within them of modes of thinking about the world. Whether called world-views, ideologies, or discourses, these structured patterns of belief have been understood to be the lenses through which people conceive and grasp their world, and how they orient to it. Further, these modes of thinking are seen to be part of the *constitution* of social groups and movements. Whether it be Max Weber on the Protestant Ethic (2002), or Karl Mannheim on Anabaptists' millennial utopias (1936), or Antonio Gramsci on the Risorgimento and hegemonic movements (1990), or Lucien Goldmann on the 'wager' in the work of Pascal and Racine (1959), or Michel Maffesoli (1993) on the 'undirected being together' that he calls essential to today's 'wandering tribes' and 'affective communities', or Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) on inoperative communities, or Barbara Ehrenreich on collective joy (2007), significant social movements are seen to take their shape around structures of thought and response: ways of being in the world. This meant that while individuals clearly must in some literal sense *produce* the works in which such structures of thought are to be found (as they did, for instance, in the examples we gave of the 'Creative' and 'New Zealand' audiences), in important senses they do not *author* them. This was a particular concern for Goldmann who wanted to develop a critical sociology of cultural authorship (see his 1975).

But there has long been a problem about method. How does one draw out such patterns, especially when in any real situation the available expressions of them may be fragmentary, only partly formulated (because of repression or limited opportunity), or mixed up with other modes of thinking? Weber's solution, famously, was the construction of ideal-types. In this solution it is the work of the researcher that purifies what only exists in mucky form. The ideal-type was for Weber a 'one-sided accentuation of reality' (1997:90), through which the researcher forms a unified and coherent analytic construct. Weber had to imagine away those elements that might be regarded as the contaminants from other world-views, in order to be able to see what a coherent and complete

commitment to one world-view might look like and entail. Similarly, Mannheim's account of millennial utopias is very much a researcher's reconstruction from limited materials, as is Goldmann's account of the 'tragic vision'.

In recent years there has been a decided move away from attempts to work with such large-scale constructs. The concept of 'ideology' fell out of favour, to be largely replaced by various concepts of 'discourse'. This was linked with the wide influence of Michel Foucault, who rejected centralised concepts of 'power', instead seeing it as distributed within the many ways in which people know and are known through institutionalised practices. But something of the ambition of the old global theorists remained. Largely replacing concepts of world-view, vision and ideology came two concepts: 'interpretive community'; and 'imagined community'. The first originated in the work of literary scholar Stanley Fish (1982), who in turn owed a large debt to the German reception theory tradition of Wolfgang Iser (1980) and Hans-Robert Jauss (1982), this concept proposed a way of understanding both the variety but also the patterned-ness of responses to cultural forms, seeing them as an expression of shared learned orientations. Its focus, then, was very much on identifying common modes of responding and interpreting. The trouble is, as Kim Schrøder (1994) pointed out very clearly, the concept of an 'interpretive community' has been used in inconsistent ways. It is for instance sometimes used to describe category-memberships (women as audiences, for instance) who have never met each other, on other occasions to describe networks of connected people (fans, for instance). 'Interpretive community' is therefore in danger of remaining very much an analyst's imputation, construct and convenience – especially in situations where people are not in any sense aware of belonging to any such community.

The second concept is that of an 'imagined community'. Originating in Benedict Anderson's (1991) attempt to rethink the origins and nature of nationalism, this concept has become more broadly a basis for exploring how people hold within themselves ideas about others who they believe share their view of the world, and who thus provide support for their views. Anderson's attention was focussed on the ways in which shared language, rules, procedures, activities, and information flows could produce a *sense of belonging to the same community*. Hence his particular interest in the rise of national newspapers, made possible among other things by increased printing and transport speeds.

The principles underlying the two concepts are quite different. One proposes an investigation of the ways in which individuals carry out acts of interpretation. The other proposes an investigation of the ways in which individuals feel themselves to be members of groups. But in fact many commentators have slid between the two concepts, not taking note of their separate origins or trajectories. Virginia Nightingale's *Handbook of Media Audiences* (2011) is one such place. Unusually, Alexander Dhoest in a recent essay (2012) has explored some of the tensions between the two, in relation to the ways national and ethnic minority audiences might be understood as 'audience communities'.

Our research was conceived within this broad tradition. Our ambition was to be able to locate and explore distinctive interpretive positions. And the stepped analytic

procedures allowed us to gradually separate out for study those people sharing an interpretive account of *Lord of the Rings*. However, in retrospect, we can see one way in which we could have gone further. Our final open question asked people: 'Is there anything else that you would want to add that would help us understand your feelings about the film?' This certainly produced some interesting answers, but what this elicited from people was primarily what *individuated* them – something in their very personal history which played into their responses to the book or film. Looking back, we now see that we might usefully have proceeded rather differently. If we had conceived a question which sought to tap into the ways in which, and the extent to which, our respondents were *aware of sharing their responses with others*, it should have been possible to begin to tie together those two current key concepts: interpretive community, and imagined community. But to do this, it would be necessary to gather responses by means which did not presume the ways in which, or the extent to which, people share views.<sup>8</sup> This is something for the future.<sup>9</sup>

### **Problems and Limitations**

With hindsight, we can now see a number of problems in our research design and its methodological operations. We close with a brief note on two main ones.

1. We noted earlier the relative lack of developed international networks with shared terms of reference (and the associated fact that colleagues in other countries were often participating voluntarily and without any kind of research funding or support). This meant that we knew that many participants came from different backgrounds, and saw themselves as working within distinct theoretical and methodological traditions. One sign of this can be found in the relative lack of use of statistical techniques and tests, despite the size of our response-set. Our Dutch colleagues who were skilled in this did in fact deploy a powerful set of statistical tests to explore, by country, the factors affecting choices of favourite character (Kuipers and De Kloet 2007). We have to admit that, while we greatly admire this work, this was way beyond our skills. But also, we wonder whether there may not be other statistical techniques which would be better suited to the kinds of iterative crossing between quantitative and qualitative domains which we see as the heart of the project's approach.
2. Although both of us had conducted audience and reception projects before, there were significant ways in which this project consciously set out to break new grounds. That is surely not a bad thing, but it does carry certain risks. Looking back, we can see that we did not have the same level of discussion and debate among ourselves and with our international partners about how we would conduct analyses as we did about the structure and operation of the implements of gathering. This meant that we wasted time, by pursuing particular findings, ahead of an overall mapping of responses. Since then, we have adopted as a general principle in research design that at the outset of a project researchers need to ask themselves: what are you going to do with the

answers? This is a principle we have followed in advising and guiding our students at all levels ever since. Having to consider in advance what might be the kinds of cross-tabulation and cross-analysis between answers to our quantitative and qualitative questions would have been of real benefit.

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### **Appendix 1: The *Lord of the Rings* Core Questionnaire.**

1. What did you think of the film?

- Extremely enjoyable
- Very enjoyable
- Reasonably enjoyable
- Hardly enjoyable
- Not enjoyable at all

2. Can you sum up your response to the film in your own words?

3. How important was it for you to see the film?

- Extremely
- Very
- Reasonably
- Hardly
- Not at all

4. What were the main reasons why you wanted to see it? Please give up to three.

5. Which of the following expressions comes closest to capturing the kind of story *The Lord of the Rings* was for you? Please choose up to three. We realise it is likely that you could choose more than this, but please help us by limiting yourself to the three most important.

Allegory	Good vs evil	Threatened homeland
Epic	Myth/Legend	War story
Fairytales	Quest	
Fantasy	Spiritual journey	None of these
Game-world	SFX film	

If you chose "None of these", what alternative word or phrase would do better?

6. Where, and when, is Middle-Earth for you? Is there a place or a time that it particularly makes you think of?

7. Who was your favourite character? Can you say why?

8. Many people measure a film against something they have already encountered. This sets up expectations and hopes for the film. Which, if any, of the following did this for you? Please choose just the most important one.

The books	Nothing in particular
The director	Another book or film
One of the stars	Something in the real world
The first two parts of the film	Something else
A game associated with the films	

9. What were your main sources of information about the film before you saw it (eg, posters and trailers, a particular review, a particular newspaper, or magazine, or a TV programme, or the Internet, or maybe friends, casual talk or etc)? Please name up to three.

10. What to you is the single most memorable thing about the film? Can you say why?

11. Was there anything which particularly disappointed you about the film? Can you say why?

12. For some people, seeing a film like this is a social event, an experience to be shared with other people. Was this true for you? Can you say in what ways?

13. Is there anything else that you would want to add that would help us understand your feelings about the film?

14. Finally, a few simple facts about yourself:

Your age:

Under 16	36-45	Over 65
16-25	46-55	
26-35	56-65	

Sex: Male / Female

Occupation:

Clerical/administrative	Professional	Service work
Creative	Retired	Student
Executive	Self-employed	Unemployed
Home/child-care	Skilled manual	Unskilled manual

How often have you seen the first two parts of the film?

*Fellowship of the Ring:*

Once

More than once

Not at all

*The Two Towers:*

Once

More than once

Not at all

Have you read the books?

Read all three books once

Read all three more than once

Read some of the books

Still reading for the first time

Haven't read any of the books

16. Where do you live? [Pull-down list of countries]

17. We hope to interview some people more fully by telephone about their responses to the film. Would you be willing to do this? If so, please give us a name and telephone number where you can be reached. This information will not be given to anyone outside this research.

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The following definitions were made available to people completing the questionnaire, should they want to check the meanings of expressions in Question 5.

Allegory ... a story symbolising the clash of moral choices in our world

Epic ... a story where everything is on a grand scale

Fairytale ... a magical world where extraordinary things can happen

Fantasy ... a story with its own rules separate from our world

Game world ... a story that invites you to role-play/game

Good vs evil ... a story of simple moral choices

Quest ... a story of dangerous journeys and attempting great things at personal cost

Myth/Legend ... a story of our imagined origins

Spiritual journey ... a story in which people discover inner truths about themselves

SFX film ... a world brought into being by sophisticated digital technologies

Threatened homeland ... a story about trying to preserve home and community

War story ... a story of huge battles

**Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> A brief explanation of this diagram. It seeks to give a visual sense of the overall scale and interconnection of choices of vernacular categories. So, 'Epic' constitutes not only the most frequent choice, but also one which was found strongly in association with all the other categories. Therefore it is presented as a kind of constant background to all the others. Relative size of circles then indicates scale of overall frequency, while position in the diagram (proximity and distance to each other) and connecting lines indicate which other categories were more or less strongly connected. The diagram aimed only to give an overall impression of the interconnections, to guide further and more detailed investigations. (The Red boundary was for display purposes, only.)

<sup>2</sup> Students of the first-year course TF1020 (a cohort of about 80), of the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies at Aberystwyth University were asked to complete test-runs of the questionnaire and offer feedback on its content and format.

<sup>3</sup> See Blaikie (1991) for an astringent commentary on the origins and subsequent misuses of this term.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell & Fiske is widely cited as among the most-referenced psychology essays, but that is not the same as closely examining it.

<sup>5</sup> Such uses never quite go away. See for instance Renzulli, J. S., & S. M. Reis (1994), 'Research related to the Schoolwide Enrichment Triad model', *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 38(1), pp.7-20; and Eric P. Jack & Amitabh S. Raturi (2006), 'Lessons learned from methodological triangulation in management research', *Management Research News*, 29:6, pp.345 - 357

<sup>6</sup> This is a recurrent problem. As recently as 1995, the *British Medical Journal* carried a quite defensive essay seeking to show that qualitative research could still be of value in face of doctors' adherence to statistically-tested research. See Mays & Pope (1995). The following year, Begley (1996) published a defence of triangulation as a means of upgrading the acceptability of qualitative research within nursing.

<sup>7</sup> Denzin was closely followed in this by Michael Patton (1990), although he adopts the softer term 'corroboration' for triangulation's contribution.

<sup>8</sup> A concrete example. In one essay arising from the project, Barker explored the responses of one young girl 'Sasha' to *The Lord of the Rings*. It becomes clear that Sasha evolves her understanding of her own response to the film in the course of our interview with her. But also what becomes clear is that, while she feels that she has formed her view of the books and films alone, she *would like to feel* that there are other people who would share her responses. Barker (2006) suggests the notion of a *projected community* to make sense of this.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, this is being tried out in a project currently being mounted by Martin Barker and three colleagues, to explore the ways in which film audiences remember Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). And for 2014, plans are currently being laid to mount a 're-run' of the *Lord of the Rings* project, around the release of the final part of *The Hobbit*. Time will tell how well these researches manage to formulate an effective eliciting question for people's imagined communities, and how productive the combination with the stepped analytic procedures will work.