

# *Photography and travel brochures: the circle of representation*

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## **Abstract**

The power of the visual image to inspire travel to distant places is well exploited by the myth-makers in tourism marketing and is important for understanding tourist behaviour. This paper explores the relevance of the ‘circle of representation’ concept to understanding one particular group of tourists: backpackers. First it reviews previous research on visual images and tourist photography, then it presents findings of research investigating the visual images of Australia promoted to and perceived by backpacker travellers. Specifically, the paper investigates evidence for the ‘hermeneutic circle’ whereby tourists (backpackers) reproduce the iconic images of destinations in their personal photographs. Brochure photographs projected to backpacker tourists and their own photography choices during travel are found to be part of a cultural ‘circle of representation’ or perhaps a ‘spiral of representation’ through which the iconic images of Australia are perpetuated.

*Keywords:* backpacker, photography, tourist destination image, hermeneutic circle, circle of representation, travel brochures, Australia

## **Introduction**

The old cliché of a picture being worth a thousand words has never been more true than for the promotion of places as tourist destinations. Visual images are a powerful component of tourist destination marketing; photographs of scenery, landmarks and icons dominate all forms of tourism promotion, from travel brochures and television commercials to internet advertisements.

Evidence of the pulling power that particular visual images have on a tourist’s behaviour is vividly displayed wherever tour buses pull up at famous sites. Carpenter (1972) provides the following example:

Older people still experience the need to translate images into observed reality. When they travel they want to see the Eiffel Tower or the Grand Canyon exactly as they saw them first on posters. An American tourist . . . does more than see the Eiffel Tower. He photographs it exactly as he knows it from posters. Better still, he has someone photograph him in front of it. Back home, that photograph reaffirms his identity with that scene (Carpenter 1972: 6, cited in Chalfen 1979: 438).

While Carpenter (1972) mentions 'older people', the same can be said for many tourists, including some backpackers, as found in this study.

This paper begins with an overview of the relevant literature. It then focuses on one particular group of tourists – backpacker tourists visiting Australia. First, the images that are projected to these tourists are investigated through a brochure study, then the photographic preferences and behaviour of backpackers travelling to (and in) Australia are investigated. It is argued that, despite their attempts to avoid all things 'touristy', backpackers are very much complicit actors in a 'circle of representation' which involves the projection, perception and perpetuation of particular photographic images in tourism.

### **Frameworks for understanding tourist images**

This paper draws on literature from the disciplines of marketing, psychology, geography, to sociology, cultural studies and anthropology. A difficulty with such multidisciplinary research, common to many studies of tourism, is that there is no common theoretical base and that readers come to the subject with widely differing understanding of the subject matter. This paper attempts to bridge the divide between the post-modernist literature where the tourist destination image studies have been focused on deconstructing the popular representations of various discourses in society, and the more positivist studies of tourist destination images prevalent in psychology and marketing. This paper draws on discursive, qualitative and quantitative methods and does not fit comfortably into either paradigm.

In the post-modern cultural studies framework, visual tourist destination images are a form of 'text' used to 'represent' the world. In this context the term 'text' is used broadly beyond the printed page, to include paintings, maps, photographs and even landscapes. While all texts imply certain meanings, these meanings are not fixed and depend partly on the reader and his or her interpretation. Texts are arranged into 'discourses' or frameworks that embrace particular combinations of narratives, concepts and ideologies that vary between cultures, classes and races. A focus in the post-modern literature has been on deconstructing the popular representations of various discourses within society – seeking out and identifying the inherent biases and influences they impart. The post-modern literature is largely based on

the notion that 'representations are not a mirror copy of some external reality'; therefore, when social scientists 'tell it like it is' they also 'tell it like they are' (Barnes and Duncan 1992: 4–5).

The post-modern approach is primarily focused on the reading and interpreting of texts by examining and interpreting them as cultural products. This framework has been applied to tourist representations by several authors (Zaring 1977; Hughes 1992; McGreevy 1992; Gregory 1995; Hutt 1996; Selwyn 1996; Crawshaw and Urry 1997; Waitt 1997; Hopkins 1998a, 1998b). The point is made that travellers' accounts are often based on previous representations of the destination in question, that is, that travellers' texts are about previous texts as much as about the destination itself (Barnes and Duncan 1992: 5).

In the positivist framework the focus has been on the link between publicly projected place images and the visitation of specific sites and it is well documented (e.g. Riley and Van Doren 1992; Schofield 1996; Tooke and Baker 1996; Beeton 1999). However, the processes through which images influence tourist decision-making and other behaviours are not well understood. As Butler (1990: 51) points out:

The importance of the visual image in determining or shaping images and visitation is probably as great as it is unstudied. The influence of actor Paul Hogan on visitation patterns to Australia is hard to measure, coincidental as it is with the Australian Bicentennial, but would appear to be enormous.

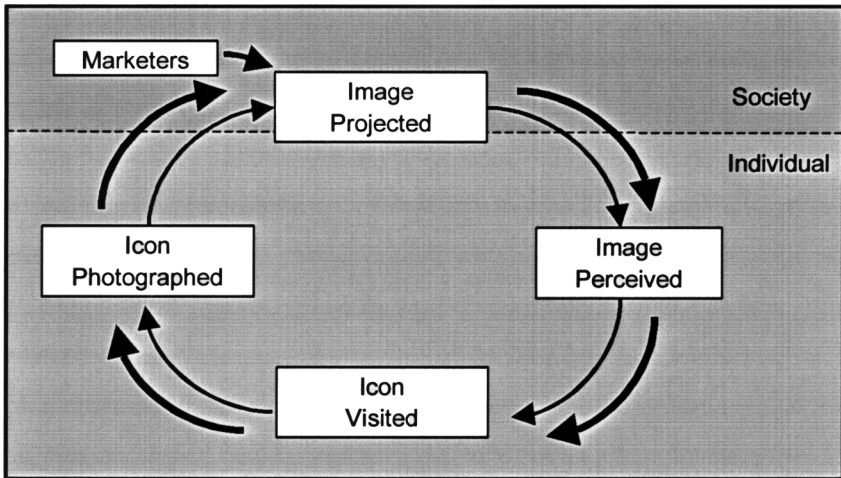
Geographers and marketers readily accept that visual images may be absorbed inadvertently, for example, from news broadcasts, popular films and television shows. They may be projected also with the direct aim of raising awareness about particular destinations through advertising. Butler (1990) discusses the role of different forms of media in shaping international travel patterns, suggesting that the strong influence of the literary in the establishment of eighteenth and nineteenth century tourist sites has been superseded by today's fascination with visual forms of media like television, film and photography. Butler places particular emphasis on the modern influence of moving pictures, predicting that the influence of the visual will continue to grow.

### *'Circles' of representation*

The idea that particular visual images circulate within a culture and become imbued with particular meanings, associations and values is not new and is common across various disciplines, although it tends to be presented in different terms. Thus, 'Culture is about "shared meanings" and meanings may be produced at several sites and circulated through several different processes or practices' (Hall 1997: 3); 'The images held by any individual

are influenced by the images circulating in their culture and place myths are constructed via images of place promotion' (Butler and Hall 1998: 121).

The 'circle of representation' is conceptualized in Figure 1. Reading from the top, images of the destination are projected collectively by the mass media. These images are perceived by individuals and may inspire travel to the destination. At the destination the tourist will likely visit the main attractions or tourist icons seen in the projected images and record his or her experience using a camera. These personal photographs are displayed back home to friends and relatives partly as proof of the visit. They may be thought of as another form of image projection, which begins the cycle again by influencing the perceived images held by other individuals. Tourism advertisers and marketers aiming to propagate attractive images may also be involved in image projection.



**Figure 1** The 'circle of representation' for tourist destination images (after Hall 1997: 1).

The notion that there are 'circles of representation' or 'circuits of culture' is useful in explaining tourist behaviour. For example, visual images chosen for photography by a tourist are often selected in the destination and reproduced from the perspective of images already seen in travel brochures, postcards, personal photographs, films and television shows at home. Thus a 'hermeneutic circle' results where images are tracked down and recaptured, and the resulting photographs displayed at home to show 'their version of the images that they had seen originally before setting off' (Urry 1990a: 140). This paper investigates the notion of 'circles of representation' in relation to one particular type of tourist – backpackers.

### *Backpackers*

The term 'backpackers' labels a group of tourists that undertakes extended, often multi-purpose trips combining work, study and leisure into a travel experience. A backpacker's motivation for travel involves meeting other travellers and local people, absorbing the culture of a destination, as well as seeing and experiencing different environments (Jenkins 2000). The 'average' backpacker to Australia is a student or graduate; usually he or she is European or North American, is in his or her twenties, stays in budget accommodation and travels on a working-holiday visa for around three to six months. This backpacker stereotype, however, belies the diversity and variety found within the backpacker market, members of which come from various age groups, and nationalities, with all kinds of different motivations and behaviours.

Various definitions for backpackers have been presented in previous studies (McCullough 1991: 3; Loker 1993: 3; Haigh 1995: 5) but in this paper Pearce's social definition of a backpacker is used. Pearce (1990: 1) presents five criteria that distinguish backpackers from other travellers and tourists:

1. a preference for budget accommodation;
2. an emphasis on meeting other travellers;
3. an independently organized and flexible travel schedule;
4. longer rather than very brief holidays;
5. an emphasis on informal and participatory holiday activities.

Not all backpackers are young, not all backpackers carry a backpack and not all backpackers stay in backpacker hostels all of the time. However, backpackers do display a propensity to travel more widely and for longer periods of time than the average tourist (Haigh 1995). Backpackers are more likely to identify themselves as 'travellers' than as 'tourists' and tend to view their own travel experiences as more meaningful and less superficial than those of the organized mass tourist (Jenkins 2000). A full examination of how accurate these self perceptions are is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, this paper seeks to investigate whether the 'circles of representation' concept, for example, the hermeneutic circle put forward by Urry (1990a) helps us to understand better the backpackers and their behaviour.

### *Backpackers and the tourist gaze*

Urry's (1990a) post-modern discourse on tourism centres on the 'tourist gaze', whereby tourist consumption is primarily visual. Urry (1990a: 135) discusses how tourism, as a phenomenon, is multi-faceted and particularly bound up with other social and cultural elements in contemporary societies.

Central to this conceptualization of tourism is the demarcation between work and play, the idea that tourism is in some way defined by its opposite – work. This segregation of work and leisure sits uncomfortably with the definition of the backpacker tourist. For backpackers, as for international students and business travellers, a trip is multi-purpose and may often include working or studying at the destination.

More widely, it seems that Urry (1990a) is describing a ‘modern’ lifestyle where home and work are fully separated, and where individuals work set hours and take set holidays. Many trends in society are breaking down the strict division between work and leisure time – for example, the institutionalization of flexible working hours, the growing numbers of self-employed persons, the growth of part-time and casual work-patterns, and an increasing prevalence of ‘short-breaks’ rather than long holidays. The backpacking lifestyle may actually be seen as an embodiment of the post-modern lifestyle, in that there is constant movement and change in the environment of the individual, with episodes of work, travel and learning frequently interspersing.

According to Urry (1990a), tourists seek escape from work and their ordinary everyday lives. The prime motivator for travel is to seek different experiences. However, it is not just the quest for new and different experiences that informs the backpacker’s decision-making, but the weighing up of differences and similarities (Jenkins 2000). Whereas differences equate with the ‘other’, with excitement, curiosity and interest; similarities equate with ‘home’ (and likeness to home) with safety, comfort, confidence and ease of travel. Each traveller considers the images of destinations in order to assess the balance between similarities and differences, comfort and danger.

Through the 1990s there has been much academic debate concerning Urry’s ‘tourist gaze’ and many suggest that it is less relevant than Urry originally argued, particularly for some types of tourists. Urry’s introduction to *Touring Cultures* (Rojek and Urry 1997) acknowledges these arguments and responds to them. This paper, without deviating too far into the ‘hot debate’ in the post-modern literature, takes Urry’s (1990a) version of the ‘tourist gaze’ as a useful starting place for further investigation of tourist (and specifically backpacker) behaviour.

The ‘tourist gaze’ is the way in which tourists see destinations. It is primarily visual. There are different versions of the gaze that are employed by different types of tourists. It can literally take a split second, and be just a ‘snap’ or a ‘blink’ – a series of disconnected blurs for day-trippers. While the ‘glance’ of tourists takes slightly longer but is still a rapid, furtive and shallow viewing, the ‘gaze’ of a traveller is leisurely, educational, serious and contemplative (Rojek and Urry 1997: 13).

What do day-trippers, tourists and travellers gaze upon? Hollinshead (2002) provides a synthesis of Urry’s concept, noting that principally gazers are predisposed to fun and/or pleasure and the consumption of things,

seeking difference, appropriating other people, places and other pasts, and pursuits which commodify things. Urry (1990a: 101) emphasizes the socially constructed character of the tourist gaze. The gaze must be directed towards certain objects or features that are extraordinary. Usually there are physical properties that make it distinct, but these can be manufactured and have to be learnt. As Urry (1990a: 86) explains:

Much of what is appreciated is not directly experienced reality itself but representations, particularly through the medium of photography. What people 'gaze upon' are ideal representations of the view in question that they internalise from postcards and guidebooks (and increasingly from TV programmes). And even when they cannot in fact 'see' the natural wonders in question they can still sense it, see it in their mind. And even when the object fails to live up to its representation it is the latter which will stay in people's minds, as what they have really 'seen'.

While earlier forms of visual image reproduction, like sketches, may have conditioned the way that particular places or views are seen today, the influence of photography has caused an explosion in the production and propagation of visual images. Urry (1990a: 139) suggests that tourism itself becomes a search for the photogenic and that travel is a strategy for the collection of photographs.

Urry (1990a) is by no means the only writer to point out the social constructions in tourist photography. Staiff (1999) integrates the work of art historians and shows how the Venetian artwork of the seventeenth century is mirrored in today's iconic images of Venice used repeatedly in postcards, tourist brochures and personal photographs. Crawshaw and Urry's (1997) empirical investigation of the hermeneutic circle centred on how professional photographers have represented the Lake District of England and how tourists perceive it.

MacCannell (2001: 36) argues that while Urry's version of the gaze is legitimate, it provides a deterministic model of tourist behaviour, and that, as well as the first gaze (Urry's 'institutionalised touristic experience' or 'the dumb tourist gaze'), there is a second freer gaze, which knows that seeing is not believing, that there is something missing from every picture, from every look and glance. The second gaze '... looks for the unexpected, not the extraordinary, objects and events that may open a window in structure, a chance to glimpse the real'.

## **Research design and methods**

This paper investigates the processes that are involved in the circle of representation for backpacker tourists visiting Australia. First, the images that are projected to these tourists are investigated through a brochure study. The contents of 17 brochures available to tourists in Vancouver,



Canada, were analysed to determine the key themes and photographic images used to promote Australia.

Second, the photographic preferences and behaviour of backpackers travelling to (and in) Australia are investigated. This was done in two stages, first through interactive semi-structured interviews with 30 backpackers actually travelling around Australia and, second, with a structured survey of 90 Canadian backpackers conducted face-to-face in Vancouver. A supplementary 'auto-photography' study was also conducted where disposable cameras were given to backpackers and copies of their photographs collected (as described further below).

### *Brochure study*

Brochures are a standard communication tool within the tourism and hospitality industry (Getz and Sailor 1993: 112). The role of the travel brochure is to provide potential tourists with not just an enhanced awareness of the destination, but also the information, knowledge and desire actually to purchase the travel product. The main aim is to 'convert' a potential tourist into an actual tourist through the sale of tourist services.

Travel brochures have been used in several previous studies to investigate the images projected of particular destinations (Crompton 1979; Dilley 1986; Stabler 1988; Chon 1991; Hughes 1992; Uzzell 1984; Hopkins 1998a). In this study the focus is on the photographs in the brochures rather than the text, maps or diagrams. The analysis of photographs includes the decoding of visual components into verbal (usually written) forms and communication (Collier and Collier 1986: 170). Two types of analysis are used to investigate the photographs: (a) content analysis, which is attribute-based and essentially descriptive; and (b) semiotic analysis, which offers a holistic (but highly subjective and culturally bound) framework for discovering the meaning and symbolism of pictures. Each technique serves a specific purpose in the translation of visual images.

#### *(a) Content analysis*

Content analysis, as a methodological technique for analysing photographs, is concerned primarily with describing quantitatively the content or appearances of a group of photographs. Like content analysis of word-based data, it usually involves the formulation of a classification scheme by which a set (or sets) of photographs are measured (or compared). For example, measurements may include the frequency with which particular subjects occur, the dominant colours and compositions, the distribution of particular poses or landscapes, and clusters of particular photographic techniques within the set.

A few tourism studies have used content analysis to investigate the visual images used in tourism marketing (e.g. Uzzell 1984; Dilley 1986; Hughes



1992; Hopkins 1998a; Davies and Bradbery 1999). Dille's (1986) study compared the images used in 21 different National Tourist Organisation brochures and found that over half the brochures devoted more than 75 percent of their page space to pictorial images. There were clear patterns in the types of images projected as well, with brochures for island destinations (such as the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago) dominated by images of coastal landscapes and recreational activities. Meanwhile 'old world' countries (like Britain, Portugal and Japan) use historical and art-type images, such as heritage buildings.

The brochure representations of Scotland were investigated by Hughes (1992) who found, for example, that just under three-quarters of the pictures in the main guide of the Scottish Tourist Board (STB) are dominated by the theme of castles and landscape. The accompanying text in the brochures suggests that the Scottish countryside is littered with friendly 'folk' like pipers, weavers, anglers and boatmen 'ever ready to perform on cue' (Hughes 1992: 35). The effect of such place promotion is to modify the places in the tourist imagination, and is often accompanied by a physical reshaping which is designed to lend credibility to the promoted place representations (Hughes 1992: 33). In this way the tourist image is perpetuated.

Davies and Bradbery (1999) investigated the different ways in which males and females are depicted in domestic Australian travel brochures. They found gendered representations similar to Goffman's (1976) results published two decades earlier. Gendered roles are depicted in photographs through poses, roles and relative size. The position of the male can indicate authority over the female, or the female can be positioned in such a way as to show deference to the male/s in the picture, or as being psychologically removed from the situation (daydreaming) and therefore dependent on others (Goffman 1976).

The racial bias contained in travel photography has been investigated by Albers and James (1988). They highlight, for example, the distorted imagery of American Navajo Indians who are depicted in 'idyllic scenes of hogans, sheep-herding and rug-weaving', photographs that are in contrast to modern lifestyles of the Navajo (Albers and James 1988: 137). Such depictions can cause distorted views that may have unfortunate consequences. For example, when tourists see the Navajo working in places such as banks and hospitals, they are no longer identified as 'real' American Indians (Albers and James 1988).

Anthropologists point to some of the pitfalls in using and interpreting photographs. The photograph, by nature:

presents all elements simultaneously without differential emphasis, while a statement is, by nature of language, lineal. [Also] the symbolic meanings of the artefacts are themselves significant and . . . their significance is once removed when substituted for by verbal presentation. (Goldschmidt and Edgerton 1961: 44)

A single photograph can have a multiplicity of meanings, but the different interpretations of a photograph do not have to conflict with each other. Semiotic analyses address these simultaneous meanings.

*(b) Semiotic analysis*

Semiotic analyses investigate the content and composition of photographs and how these combine to communicate through signs and symbols various messages about the places they depict. A 'sign' is most commonly defined as 'something that stands for something else' (Sebeok 1986: 936).

The semiotic analysis of holiday brochure photographs suggests that tourists are attracted not through overt and superficial attributes of holiday destinations as portrayed in photographs, but by providing the reader with a range of cultural tools with which fantasy, meaning and identity can be created and constructed (Uzzell 1984: 79). A conceptual framework usually used in semiotic analyses is to identify the popular myths in society that are used in the photographs (see Barthes 1972). For example, Hopkins (1998a) found that the signs of rurality contained in brochures of the Lake Huron region of Canada are centred on the myths of natural environment, spatial exotica, the countryside, community and heritage. In using the term 'myth', Hopkins (1998a: 154) does not imply that these signs are untrue or deceiving, but he does suggest that the repetition of these symbols and myths may present a problem for the tourism industry of the area: 'Imagination and desire fuel place-myths, but familiarity and dashed expectations will dissolve them. Repetitious themes, tired icons, reworked symbols and similar place-products, regardless of the rhetoric in which they are wrapped, dampen consumer appetites'.

Part of what distinguishes tourism advertising from other areas where place photographs are used is the ways in which pictures are selected, symbolized and combined. The special features of travel photography are found not only in the choice of subject, but also by the ways in which they are represented (Sontag 1979; Marsh 1984; Albers and James 1988). However, the idea that a photograph is a 'window on reality' is an illusion (Albers and James 1988: 150; Snyder 1980). Media makers select, structure and shape what is photographed and then edit what is eventually printed (Hall 1982: 64) to symbolize reality. Photography is a major force in the manipulation of imagery and it thereby influences tourist behaviours without appearing to do so (Hall 1982; Woollacott 1982).

Uzzell (1984) presents a cognitive psychologist's interpretation of how the images from travel brochures operate to influence travel behaviour. First, the idiom of advertising is restated whereby consumers are provided with information that influences their attitude to the destination, thereby influencing their behaviour. But Uzzell (1984) does not see the tourist as a passive receiver of these images who just lets them wash over his or herself. Rather, the tourist is an active audience who 'searches out the meaning, drawing on the "bricolage" of meaning systems (Levi-Strauss

1966) which comprise the cultural baggage one takes to any situation' (Uzzell 1984: 82).

The photographs advertising a tourist destination are only successful if they make a link between the individual's motivations, goals or preferences and the target destination. One of the most common motivations for a holiday is to 'escape' the everyday environment and work (Crompton 1979; Dann 1997). Holiday brochures are packed with signposts to a variety of escape routes (Uzzell 1984: 85). Photographs depicting spectacular environments, idyllic settings, secluded places and luxurious surrounds all link with the desire to escape in the minds of the consumer. Similar signposts also exist in the destination as Urry (1990a: 47) comments:

the contemporary tourist gaze is increasingly signposted. There are markers which identify the things and places worthy of our gaze. Such signposting reveals a relatively small number of tourist nodes. The result is that most tourists are concentrated within a very limited area.

The signposting Urry (1990a) and Uzzell (1984) refer to need not be taken literally (although there are many interpretative notice boards and signs at tourist sites), as the very inclusion of a particular photograph of a tourist site in a travel brochure can be construed as a sign of its significance. These signs have a very important influence on one particular type of tourist behaviour – photography.

### *Images of Australia projected to the Canadian market*

Brochures advertising Australia were collected from retail travel agencies in Vancouver during the period June–September 1998. A content analysis was performed on the brochure photographs using the general technique described by Collier and Collier (1986) with stages of familiarization, inventory, analysis, tabulation and statistical analysis, followed by a recapitulation of the original photographic data. The initial stage of familiarization indicated some themes which were explored further through inventory whereby content analysis was used. This paper focuses on the colours, landscapes, people and activities shown in the photographs especially the key tourist icons and symbols depicted.

#### *Brochure covers*

The most common images on brochure covers were the image of Uluru (Ayers Rock) and the Sydney Opera House, followed by sandy beaches alongside tropical blue waters. Surprisingly, the most famous of Australian fauna, the kangaroo, is not shown often on brochure covers; however, the koala often appears.

By placing the major tourist icons on the brochure cover the advertiser

aims to increase the chance of customers recognizing the icons and then choosing the brochure. Thus, the image of Uluru because it is unique, distinctive and highly recognizable comes to symbolize Australia. But it is only one particular view or frame of Uluru – with the rock silhouetted against the sky – that is used most often to capture the attention of the tourist.

### *Landscapes*

The iconic representations on the brochure covers are usually repeated several times within the brochures. As well, new second-level icons or symbols are introduced, as are depictions of the activities that a tourist can expect to enjoy in Australia.

Overall, the most dominant theme in the brochures was the natural environment, and two natural landscapes dominate the brochures – the beaches and reef symbolic of the coast, and red rocky outcrops symbolic of the outback. Table 1 shows the most common types of landscape photographs in the brochures in rank order of occurrence.

**Table 1** Most common landscapes shown in 17 brochures depicting Australia

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Photograph</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>
1	Beaches	109
2	Great Barrier Reef	79
3	Red rocks	79
4	Opera House	49
5	Uluru (Ayers Rock)	45

Second-order symbols such as the Kata Tjuta (The Olgas) capture less attention than Uluru, but are featured in most of the brochures. Other red rocks also proliferate in the brochures and gain a small amount of the reflected glory of Uluru. In total there were 79 photographs of red rocks (other than Uluru or Kata Tjuta) in the brochures examined, with an average of 5.3 for each of the backpacker brochures and 4.2 for each for the mainstream brochures. It would seem red rocks are an important signifier of the Australian tourist landscape.

### *People*

The content analysis confirmed the findings of previous brochure studies relating to the ‘gendered’ space of tourist advertising (Goffman 1979; Davies & Bradbery 1999). On average, each brochure contained just over five photographs of women wearing swimsuits, with some showing as many as 10. There were 1.6 times as many photographs showing women than men in swimsuits, and this is because women are typically used as decorative additions to a photograph of a swimming pool or natural setting. A single woman reclining on the beach and a female diving into a crystal clear

swimming pool are both clichés of tourism advertising the world over and are used regularly in travel brochures advertising Australia.

A specific example of the decorative female is the 'rear view' of a female facing the ocean. She is usually wearing a swimsuit, or perhaps just half a swimming costume. This pose is used both as a voyeuristic 'attention grabber' and as a decorative addition to the natural environment. The rear view technique is used extensively in the brochures and does not always involve a semi-clad female. Sometimes the rear view of a male fishing is used, or a group of hikers looking at a mountain or waterfall. Most commonly a group of people taking in a beautiful view is used. The scale of the people proportionate to the setting differs according the landscape being depicted. In coastal settings the person appears large and usually quite close to the camera, while in mountainous settings the people usually appear in the middle distance as part of the landscape. The mountain-viewing rear view is reminiscent of nineteenth century Romantic landscape painting, where the convention of the person(s) facing away from the viewer of the paintings was intended as a comment on the other-worldly beauty of nature (Messari 1997: 26). The seaside rear view can have a different intention, namely to arouse the viewer's sexual curiosity and to attract the viewer's eye through the power of suggestion.

#### *Images projected to backpackers*

One aim of the brochure study was to see whether there are particular images that are promoted to backpacker tourists which are different from the images of Australia promoted to other international tourists. For this reason the 17 brochures were divided into two groups: (a) those aimed at the youth and/or backpacker market; and (b) those aimed at the mainstream tourist market.

The brochure covers give a good indication of the market at which each brochure is aimed. The large mainstream tour companies (such as Qantas Vacations) used bold colours and clear block-like text to create crisp lines and with strong, clear layouts most of the photographs are in square or rectangular frames. The companies which aim at the youth or backpacker market (such as Oz Experience) use a more busy collage-like style with overlapping photographs, where images may be tilted and blend into each other. The Oz Experience brochure breaks away from the obligatory 'glossy' format to make use of recycled paper showing a cartoon-like background with tourist 'snapshots' overlaid to represent the souvenir photos that the purchaser will have the chance to take home.

Table 2 gives the frequency of occurrence for each type of photograph icon in youth brochures, mainstream brochures and in total. The backpacker brochures show far more activities, particularly outdoor sports and pursuits such as sky-diving, bungee-jumping, scuba diving and horse and camel riding. The mainstream brochures are more likely to picture the accommodation and facilities, passive activities such as eating and drinking,

walking on the beach, sunbathing and petting animals. Mainstream brochures also show more iconic animals (such as the koala, kangaroo) and indigenous people in costume or body paint.

**Table 2** Content analysis of photographs in brochures advertising Australia: average frequency of particular photograph depictions per brochure

<i>Photographs depicting</i>	<i>Backpacker brochures</i>	<i>Mainstream brochures</i>
Physical iconic landmarks (Uluru, Sydney Opera House, Great Ocean Road, Great Barrier Reef)	9.9	13.5
Physical landscapes (red rocks, beaches, natural vistas, waterfalls)	16	12.3
Animals (koala, kangaroo, crocodile)	1.3	26
People	19.4	16.0
Active sports (horse-riding, rafting, surfing, etc.)	21.4	7.4
Passive activities (walking, sunbathing, eating, posing for photographs, etc.)	11.3	9.4
'Group fun'	5.6	0.7
'Romantic couples' (hand-holding etc.)	1.3	3.9

One significant difference between the mainstream and the backpacker brochures is the frequency of 'group fun' pictures. Backpacker brochures show young people in small groups having fun out-doors, white-water rafting, sailing, playing volleyball and posing for photographs. Mainstream brochures are more likely to show couples relaxing together, walking hand-in-hand along the beach or sightseeing.

To understand the differences between these brochures, it is also useful to examine the underlying messages and symbolism of these photographs. These messages are usually quite simple but important, in that they link the tourist's own motivations or goals for their trip with the destination. The stereotype of the 'romantic couple' is intended to portray a relaxed atmosphere conducive to deepening or reinvigorating a sexual relationship with a partner. The intimacy between a couple is usually portrayed by physical contact such as hand-holding. The display of large proportions of skin has direct sexual connotations. The implication of these romantic depictions is that Australia can offer the idyllic natural settings that will provide the perfect location for a loving and romantic encounter to enhance your relationship.

The 'group fun' photographs that dominate the backpacker brochures have a different message. They picture mixed groups frolicking in the water and playing games in mixed sex groups. They beckon fun-loving,

adventurous young tourists, offering the chance for intrepid journeys, challenges, fun-times, group membership, camaraderie, new friendships, social intimacy and the prospect of meeting potential lovers. The photographs show both males and females actively participating in adventurous and physical activities. However, traditional sex-roles are shown in almost all cases, with the male shown in a dominant position.

Another technique used in many of the backpacker brochures is to show pictures that are deliberately posed, such as groups of young people usually in spectacular settings looking directly at the camera (sometimes with arms or legs in the air). These photographs could well be the snapshots of a tourist, as they foretell the very photographs that participants will be able to capture on their trip.

In summary, the brochure study highlighted the predominance of particular stereotypical photographs among the images projected of Australia; natural landscapes are the most common type of photograph, particularly the beaches, the red rocks (especially Uluru). There are clearly themes coming through from backpacker tourist brochures that are in common with the mainstream tourist market (such as red rocky landscapes) and others that are distinct from the mainstream market (such as group fun). The next part of the study sought to investigate whether the backpackers themselves were also involved in reproducing these stereotypical representations.

### **Photography study**

Several theories have been put forward to explain a tourist's propensity to photograph while on a touristic trip. Sontag suggests that photographs are accumulated during the trip providing indisputable evidence that 'the trip was made . . . and fun was had' (1979: 9). Urry (1990b) suggests that photography can be a means of transcribing reality, providing evidence that an event took place. The photographic record provides a point of validation, proof of the visit to show people at home and to trigger personal memories.

As a form of tourist behaviour, photography has received some attention in the literature, but few research studies have focused directly upon it. The camera is often used as a 'selective filter' (Teymur 1993). Photographic collections may be thought of as concealing as much as they reveal about the lived experience of those who own them (Markwell 1997: 132). For example, in Markwell's study of a student study group touring East Malaysia, the tour group spent two days at an isolated jungle camp where a satellite signal-receiving dish was located adjacent to one of the huts. A number of people had taken photographs of this hut, but none of them showed the satellite dish. Markwell (1997: 150) comments, 'it would appear that such a symbol of modern technology and global communication



was not considered appropriate in photographs of an authentic camp-site in the jungles of Borneo'.

Anthropologist Richard Chalfen (1979) highlighted a number of unexplored relationships relating to the types and patterns of photographic behaviour, the subject matter of tourist's photographs, and the different responses to tourist photography exhibited by the host communities being photographed. He notes that different types of tourists have different photography behaviours that illustrate differing host-guest relationships, and that these are related to their motivations. Thus, it is expected that backpackers exhibit different types of photographic behaviour from other tourist groups.

### *Backpackers' photography*

What kinds of photographs do backpacker tourists take? How are the public images of tourist places reproduced in the personal images and photographic evidence of their journeys? This section of the paper investigates whether backpackers reproduce visual stereotypes in their personal photographs.

All 30 of the backpackers interviewed in stage 1 were travelling with at least one camera and most said that they regularly used it to take photographs. Respondents were asked what kind of photographs they liked to take and why. The most favoured type of photograph was found to be natural scenery. The most common reasons for taking photographs were to capture memories and to show people later on. From the responses of backpackers interviewed, a structured survey with 10 response categories was formulated and 90 Canadian backpackers were asked, 'When travelling, how often do you take each of the following types of photographs?' Backpackers responded on a five-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

The results indicate that nature and scenery are the most frequent targets for backpacker photographs, followed by friends and famous sights. Photographs of local people ranked low, with the least popular type of photograph being other travellers. Between males and females the only statistically significant difference was that males said they were more likely to take photographs of buildings. 'Other' responses that backpackers mentioned as subjects that they also photograph during travel were street scenes, children, the ocean and archaeology sites.

These results indicate that there are clear patterns of photography preferences among backpackers with regard to what they like to photograph. However, from the qualitative interviews undertaken, it seems the reasons why backpackers photograph are less congruent. Some take photographs in order to share experiences with people far away; others do so to mark events down in history; some see their photographs as artistic expressions; and others as a hobby to improve their photography skills. Perhaps the main

reason that travellers and tourists take photographs is not mentioned by most backpackers, namely, that it is an established and expected tourist behaviour. It is 'normal', conventional and predictable that tourists take photographs of the places they visit and it is an accepted part of being a tourist. Only one respondent out of the 120 interviewed said that he does not take photographs.

One aim of this paper is to investigate whether Urry's (1990a) concept of the 'hermeneutic circle' (the reproduction of famous images by individual tourists) is useful in understanding backpacker's photographic behaviour. The responses of backpackers to a series of open-ended interview questions and the structured survey indicate that it is useful. From the survey of 90 Canadian backpackers it was found that famous sights are photographed 'always', 'often' or 'very often' by 77 percent. Only three respondents replied that they 'never' take photographs of famous sights.

The qualitative interviews revealed the following contrasting opinions with regard to photographing tourism icons: 'The "real Australia" was when I was standing in front of the Opera House – that's the photo you send home to Mum and Dad' (Canadian male, 25). 'I like to photograph nature and the rainforest, not people so much. I photographed the light-house and the rainbows and sports and some party photos, not "me in-front of this" or "me in-front of that"' (Dutch female, 25).

A Canadian interviewee provided one fascinating example of the hermeneutic circle. 'Cathy' discovered backpacker travel as a mature tourist visiting Australia on her first overseas trip at the age of 44. Cathy was interviewed after she had returned home to Canada and her favourite photograph was taken at Whitehaven beach in the Whitsunday Islands. The photograph is composed as a classic 'rear-view' showing Cathy's back as she sits on the beach facing the ocean (Figure 2). Cathy told me the story behind this photograph:

I have lots of photographs of me on the boat in the Whitsundays because my friends from Germany were on the yacht and they took them. These are photos I wouldn't necessarily have, except that Thomas would pick up my camera and just take them – he had the same type of camera as me so he knew how to use mine.

This photo is on Whitehaven Beach at Whitsunday Island. I got Thomas to take it for me. I set it all up for him at the top of the beach and then went back down the beach facing the water and whipped my top off for about 30 seconds or so! It turned out so well that I sent a copy of the photo to the charter company and they asked me if they could use it in their promotions. So, I sent them the negative and they sent me this copy with the writing on it – but when they use it in advertisement they've even added sails onto the boat. They also turned the picture into a postcard that they give to their clients.

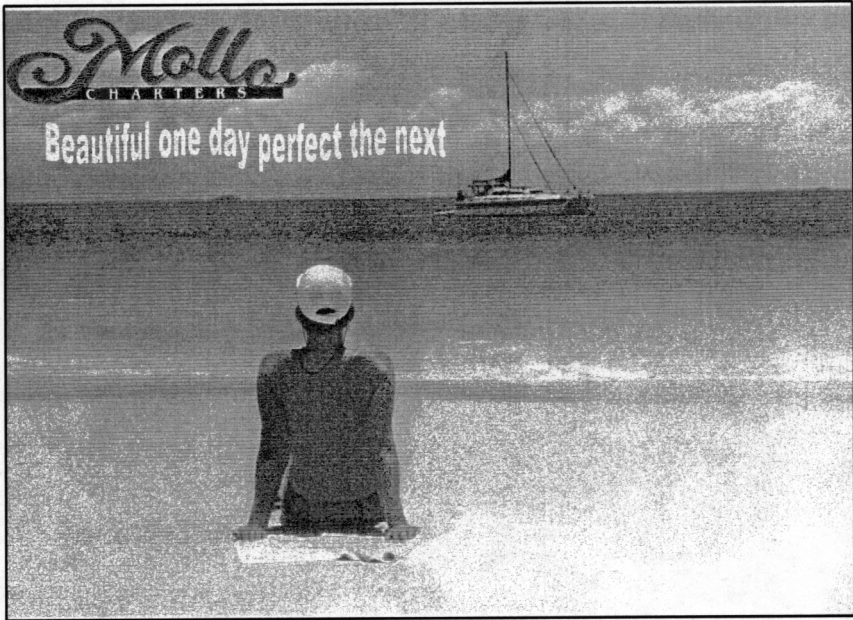


Figure 2 'Cathy's' photograph.

### *Auto-photography camera study*

To further investigate backpackers' actual photography, an 'auto-photography' (Ziller 1990) camera study that involved backpackers photographing their own experience of destinations was conducted by distributing disposable single-use cameras to backpacker tourists travelling in Australia. Participants were asked to use the cameras (in just the same way that they would use their own camera) at specific tourist locations around Australia and to return them to the researcher in prepaid envelopes. As an incentive for participation in this study, participants received free film and free copies of the photographs as the researcher developed the films, printed two sets of photographs and sent one set to the participants' home addresses.

Because of the high costs involved in purchasing, developing and printing the photographs, this component of the study was only conducted with a small sample of respondents (initially 10). Each respondent was given five cameras and asked to take photographs (in just the way they normally would) at five Australian tourist locations: Sydney, Byron Bay, Fraser Island, the Cairns region and Central Australia.

Unfortunately the response rate was not high. Only three subjects returned a full set of five cameras. Two subjects withdrew from the study

mid-way and returned their cameras unused. One participant had her backpack stolen with the cameras inside and several subjects used the cameras in locations other than those suggested above. Others simply did not send the cameras back. In all, about 20 cameras were returned, and two of these turned out to have only a few shots used on them rather than the full 24 frames.

The resulting photographic images were 'infinitely describable' containing immense amounts of information (Aitken and Wingate 1993: 68). As such, a multitude of coding categories could be constructed for the analysis stage; however, the review was kept simple and focused on the research question: Do backpackers reproduce visual stereotypes in personal photographs? The photographs of each location were displayed on a notice-board according to the photographer and the location represented. Patterns among the photographs were noted with regard to similar objects and compositions. The photographs were also compared to the key stereotypes projected in travel brochures.

Despite the limitations of the camera study with its small sample size, it was clear that there were some recurring images amongst the photographs taken by the backpacker participants. The double icon image of the Opera House with the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the background was depicted in three out of the six sets of photographs of Sydney, while the Opera House on its own was pictured in 11 percent of the photographs of Sydney. The comments of one Canadian backpacker highlight the significance of the Sydney Opera House experience for him:

I didn't expect that it would feel any different to be in Australia but when I saw the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House in Sydney, I just thought 'this is bizarre!' A landmark like that really makes it all set in and you just go 'wow!'  
(Canadian male, 22)

Regional stereotypes were also depicted, including the Byron Bay lighthouse and the Atherton Tablelands curtain fig tree. There were strong similarities between the key stereotypes found in the brochure study and the photographs taken by backpackers.

## Conclusion

Cathy's story (along with other evidence presented above) indicates that backpacker tourists, while often portrayed as 'anti-tourists' (e.g. Jacobsen 2000) (avoiding the 'tourist-traps' and all things 'touristy'), are also susceptible to the myths and messages of photographic tourist images. Like the tourists engaged in *The Tourist Gaze* described by Urry (1990a), backpacker travellers seek out particular views that are 'photogenic' and reproduce these in their personal photographs. Certain scenes, such as the outline

of Uluru on the horizon against a backdrop of the sunset colour, come to symbolize 'the real Australia' and are captured as compelling evidence of their travels.

The tourism marketers who sell Australia as a destination in the international market rely to a significant extent on the iconographic power of images such as Uluru and the Sydney Opera House. The brochure analysis presented in this paper supports Uzzel's (1984: 80) finding that holiday brochures reinforce predominant sexual, racial and national stereotypes. As well, particular compositions that are different to those used in mainstream tourism advertising are used to target the backpacker market. These symbolize adventure and 'group fun'. As Uzzel (1984: 97) suggests:

holiday brochures sell a product. But they also try to sell something more valuable: images of ourselves. Holiday companies provide one with a set of cultural, social, political and economic assumptions out of which one can assemble reality and fantasy. The association of people, objects and ideas in advertisements do not exist independently of the traveller: they are given to him as tools to create himself.

The repetitive use of photographs showing action, adventure and 'group fun' shots specifically link-in with the motivations of young travellers like backpackers who pursue adventure, enjoyment and new friends in their travels. The 'group fun' shots pre-empt the tourist's own photographs to be taken on the trip.

The results discussed here indicate that there is a circular process by which particular tourist images are produced, projected, perceived, propagated and perpetuated. The results support Urry's (1990b: 140) notion of a hermeneutic circle, whereby images are tracked down and recaptured, and the resulting photographs displayed upon return home by the backpackers as evidence of the trip. Given the constant projection of images through destination marketing, another way of conceptualizing 'the circle' may be to see it as an outward spiral, where each successive whirl of the spiral increases the audience for a tourist destination image and adds another layer of symbolic meaning to the image. While additional advertising and image projection (through film and television for example) results in more and more layers of symbolism, these layers are 'anchored' to a central visual stereotype or tourist icon. Being a 'circular' process (as suggested in Figure 1), this process is not a simple linear cause-effect relationship, but rather it is a circuitous process of cultural production and reproduction. Individual backpackers themselves are active participants in this process, as are the tourist destination promoters.

While the images, icons and stereotypes projected by the tourism industry are easy to identify, the processes by which these images are perceived and then perpetuated by tourists are more difficult to explain. To what extent are tourists conscious of their own role in the circle or spiral of

representation? How are the tourist images perceived or stored in their memory? How do tourists deal with any incongruency between their expectations and experience of particular sights? Are backpackers more interested in photographing the extraordinary or the unexpected? This paper has explored the relationship between the images projected of Australia by tourism marketers and the photographic behaviour of backpackers, and has shown that there are links between these two modes of representation. There is much scope for future research in this area that will help develop an understanding of the meaning of the tourist experience.

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### Biographical note

Based in Sydney, Dr Olivia Jenkins currently works as Research Manager for the Tourism Task Force, a national advocacy group for Australia's tourism and transport industries. This paper is based on her research as a Commonwealth Scholar at the University of British Columbia, and through the Department of Geographical Sciences and Planning at the University of Queensland, Australia. (e-mail: ojenkins@wxc.com.au)

## Résumé: La photographie et les dépliants de voyage: le cercle de représentation

Les promoteurs de mythes touristiques savent bien exploiter le pouvoir de l'image visuelle à encourager les voyages vers des lieux lointains, pouvoir important si l'on veut comprendre le comportement des touristes. Cet article explore la validité du concept du 'cercle de représentation' pour comprendre un groupe en particulier de touristes, les voyageurs sac à dos. En premier lieu, on revoit la recherche entreprise sur les images visuelles et la photographie pour présenter ensuite les résultats d'une étude sur les images de l'Australie présentées aux voyageurs sac à dos et la perception qu'en ont ces voyageurs. L'article, plus précisément, recherché des témoignages pour le 'cercle herméneutique' de par lequel les photographies personnelles des voyageurs (sac à dos) reproduisent les images clé des destinations qu'ils visitent. On a ainsi découvert que les photos de dépliants et les choix personnels de photographies prises par les voyageurs faisaient partie d'un 'cercle de représentation' culturel, ou peut être d'une 'spirale de représentation', qui perpétue les images symboliques de l'Australie.

*Mots-clés:* voyageur sac à dos, photographie, image de destination touristique, cercle herméneutique, cercle de représentation, dépliant de voyage

## Zusammenfassung: Photographie und Reisebroschüren: Der 'Circle of Representation'

Die Kraft von bildlichen Darstellungen zur Anregung von Reisen zu entfernten Orten wird von den Mythenbildnern des touristischen Marketings gezielt eingesetzt und ist ein wichtiges Element zum Verständnis des touristischen Verhaltens. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Bedeutung des Konzepts des 'circle of representation' zum Verständnis einer besonderen Gruppe von Touristen, den Rucksackreisenden. Dabei werden zunächst vorausgegangene Untersuchungen zu bildlichen Darstellungen und touristischer Photographie ausgewertet und anschließend eigene Forschungsergebnisse zur bildlichen Darstellung von Australien für und in der Wahrnehmung von Rucksackreisenden vorgestellt. Vor allem sucht der Beitrag Belege für den 'hermeneutischen Kreis' zu bringen, nach dem Touristen (Rucksackreisende) die ikonenhaften Ansichten der Destinationen in ihren persönlichen Photographien wiederholen. Den Rucksackreisenden gezeigtes Bildmaterial der Reisebroschüren und deren eigene Reisephotographien erwiesen sich dabei als Teil des 'circle of representation' oder auch einer 'Spirale der Darstellung', welche die ikonenhaften Ansichten von Australien verewigend fortschreibt.

*Stichwörter:* Rucksackreisende, Photographie, touristisches Destinationsimage, hermeneutischer Kreis, darstellerischer Kreis, Reisebroschüren