

### **Semantic differentials**

One of the most popular and yet simple of all of the ways of eliciting reactions, feelings and emotions is that of the semantic differential. In its most basic form this technique depends upon asking people to respond to a stimulus by placing it along a series of dimensions, which are created by opposing adjectives such as 'friendly' and 'unfriendly' or 'ordered' and 'chaotic'. This sort of investigation ultimately depends upon the idea of constructs first developed by Kelly (Kelly 1955). Kelly showed that people use a limited number of constructs to judge things, and that many of these constructs overlap. For example, when assessing people you meet and know, you may notice that they vary in a number of characteristics. You may think that some are extremely trustworthy, while some may seem to be more creative, others may be very optimistic, some clever, humorous, punctual, and so on. There may well be many more dimensions along which you could, if asked, judge people. However, you may find that in general if people are trustworthy you also find them punctual, and if they are creative they usually also have a good sense of humour. Overall you will also undoubtedly like some people more than others, and we may well find that this liking depends much more on some dimensions than others.

If you are very open minded, you might like a wide variety of people for quite different reasons. However, some people have rather narrowly defined sets of critical constructs. Kelly, for example, reported a subject who seemed to judge people more or less on whether or not they had been in the army. If they had, he thought them to be reliable, good, polite and so on. From such ideas Kelly was to go on to build a complete theory of personality as defined by the constructs we employ (Kelly 1963). I certainly know some people who tend to judge buildings in similarly simplistic ways – I know quite a few people who seem to dislike all modern buildings and to like all old ones! Now it seems likely that architects will have more elaborate constructs to judge architecture than the average person in the street, and it also seems likely that they value some of these constructs differently to the ordinary users of their buildings. We can use construct theory and its applications to establish such things and to measure them in some way.

Relying on such ideas makes tools available to render ordinary people quite articulate and lucid about the qualities of places. The semantic differential is a simplification of the original notion of constructs and enables us to obtain useful comparative data. Psychologists are just like architects in their liking for long and grand-sounding names for simple ideas! The semantic differential as used in investigating place has to rely upon appropriate bipolar adjectives. Examples might include a scale from 'hard' to 'soft', one from 'open' to 'closed' and so on. Usually these scales are either five or seven points