Adventures in Paradox

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Abstract

The popularity of adventure recreation and adventure education has arisen, in part, from an assumption that adventure experiences are radically different from those of everyday life in modern societies. A paradox previously pointed out is that those seeking adventurous experiences often make use of technical and technological prosthetics, thus safeguarding against risk associated with adventure. This has generally been understood in the context of the *risk society*. However, a further and, we argue, deeper paradox than this is manifest in the current popularity of adventure recreation and education. This is the conflict between the use of adventure to provide experiences supposedly 'missing' in contemporary societies and the extensive centrality of notions and ideologies of adventure in the history, literature and process of economic expansion of those same societies. We explore this paradox by characterising the current focus on adventure as either deeply contradictory at the social and economic levels, or conversely, as an unintended and reflexive process of (adventurous) subversion of the economic and social forces that initially harnessed the notion of adventure. Our purpose in doing this is to offer a novel framework for researching the notion of adventure in outdoor education and outdoor recreation.

Introduction

This paper sets out to explore the notion of adventure as a socio-historical construct. Our search for previous literature on the social and historical development of the idea of adventure turned up very little in English but two authors provide a foundation for our analysis here. Paul Zweig's (1974) work is predominantly a history of adventure story-telling, while Michael Nerlich (1984, 1987, 1997) goes further in arguing for the centrality of adventure ideology to the development and continuity of modern capitalist societies.

Unfortunately, much of Nerlich's original output is written in non-English European languages and so is difficult for monolingual English speakers to access. In addition to this, as Nerlich himself explains (1997), his work has received little attention, perhaps because it falls between academic disciplines. We believe, however, that it represents a valuable contribution to understandings of adventure and one aim of this paper is to begin to illuminate Nerlich's work. We argue that a full understanding of adventure must include a socio-historical dimension in addition to the usual emphases on psychology, social psychology and the philosophy of human nature.

Such a socio-historical account reveals that the notion of adventure is swathed in paradox. At different times it has been conceived as either the route to securing the future or the means of opening up uncertainty and therefore possibility (Nerlich, 1987); it has been instrumental as an ideology supporting the physical and economic expansion of states and empires (Nerlich, 1987) or promoted as a therapeutic catalyst for intrapersonal self-development (e.g. Hopkins and Putnam, 1993; Gass, 1993); it

has served (and helped preserve) the interests of the petty nobility in medieval Europe but has also been pivotal in the rise of the bourgeoisie (Nerlich, 1987). Today, adventure is simultaneously commodified and romanticised as escape from modernity. Most generally, adventure is an enduring notion historically yet it is a phenomenon that is tightly determined and modified by cultural, social and economic settings.

The valorisation of adventure in modern leisure and outdoor education contexts today is in many ways a simple continuation of this paradoxical aspect. To an extent this has been recognised in work that has contrasted the element of risk necessary for an activity to qualify as adventure with the increasing technological management and minimisation of such risk (Wurdinger and Potter, 1999 and, more generally, Giddens, 1991 and Van Loon, 2002). This contrast, in turn, can be understood as one example of the contradictions inherent in the so-called *risk society* (e.g., see Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). As individuals are left to their own devices to construct their own biographies they are also left alone to deal with the risks associated with that project. Adventure (as risk and uncertainty) therefore becomes necessary in the lives of individuals in order for them to live any life at all and this leads to the desire both to valorise and manage adventure.

We contend, however, that there is a deeper paradox that inheres in the pursuit and advocacy of adventure in the modern world. The paradox that we believe needs particular attention is that between the crucial role of adventure ideology in the historical development of the modern, industrialised world and economy, on the one hand, and the current promotion of adventure as the romantic escape from that world, on the other. In this way the pursuit of adventure is a reflexive feature of modernity. We leave it to the end of this discussion to consider whether this reflexivity usurps romanticised adventure itself or, alternatively, actually leads the charge to subvert modernity by creating ‘unintended’ post-modern, and transformative, consequences.

To develop our argument we explore the rhetoric surrounding the rationale for adventure with reference to current practices of adventure in recreation and education. We then move on to discuss the historical development of the ideology of adventure from medieval times in Europe to its present global popularity and profile in such areas as tourism and outdoor education. In the following section we step back from this detailed discussion and consider this socio-historical paradox of adventure in the light of the competing ideologies, movements and economic processes particularly in the last two centuries. Finally, we draw conclusions about the nature of this paradox and discuss the extent to which the recent focus on adventure in outdoor education and recreation is a continuation of or a more radical departure from this historically embedded incorporation of adventure into social, cultural and economic processes.

Adventure – a psychological phenomenon

In the outdoor/adventure education literature, the idea of adventure has been understood as a largely socio-psychological phenomenon (see for example Gass (1993), Hopkins and Putnam (1993), Schoel, Prouty and Radcliffe (1988), Nadler and Luckner (1992; Fitzsimmons and Elshoff, 1997; George and Cannon, 1997; Jones, 1997; Mayes, 1997; and others). This is consistent with the conceptualisation of

leisure as essentially involving psychological states and processes and social psychological variables such as perceived freedom and intrinsic motivation (e.g., see Neulinger, 1981; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Mannell, 1991; Mannell and Kleiber, 1997). Major influences on outdoor / adventure education thinking have been Colin Mortlock's (1984) book, *The Adventure Alternative*, and the experiential education movement (including its manifestations in the Outward Bound movement and later American entities such as Project Adventure, Inc (see Hirsch, 1999; Prouty, 1999)). Mortlock defined adventure in physiological and psychological terms:

> "To adventure in the natural environment is consciously to take up a challenge that will demand the best of our capabilities - physically, mentally, emotionally. It is a state of mind …" (p19).

He differentiates between "the joy of living" which is the essence of life and "the anxieties of modern living" (p19). This distinction illustrates one of the enduring notions of adventure in the outdoor education / recreation literature and practice. That is, that adventure is a psychological palliative against the ravages of everyday life in the later twentieth century (see also Mortlock, 2001 and Bowles, 2002/3 for an overview of Mortlock's personal withdrawal into an 'inner journey' of adventure). Similarly, Ewert (1989) draws almost exclusively on psychological theories and models: examples are motivation theories, arousal theories, and attribution theories. In this literature, then, adventure exists as a 'natural' phenomenon, a propensity in the human genome, conveniently accessible for application in a wide variety of enterprises throughout time and space. The arena of action is generally limited to individuals, rather than entire societies or cultures. In concert with this individualistic view of adventure, adventure activities are typified and exemplified by action in backcountry (wilderness, remote, 'natural environment') locations, geographically distant from everyday life and society. The development of outdoor and adventure activities in New Zealand is a case in point.

Outdoor education in schools (in New Zealand and some other British Commonwealth countries, at least) arose as a manifestation of the progressive-liberal educational ideology that gained credence during the twentieth century. It was a response to urbanisation and industrialisation, and to mid-century and post-WW2 concerns for youth and environment, and within a context of emerging individualism and outdoor recreational expansion (Lynch, 1999). In New Zealand, both outdoor education and outdoor recreation have expanded rapidly since the 1970s, stimulated in part by deliberate commercial branding of the country as a "young, fresh, unspoilt and innovative" tourist destination and this has "provided strong cultural as well as economic elements in the growth of adventure tourism" (Cloke and Perkins, 1998:277). This strategy has promoted a view of New Zealanders as risk-takers and innovators within and beyond the realm of recreation and has driven "continual experimentation with bigger, better and more exciting thrills in the outdoors environment" (Cloke and Perkins, 1998: 282). The 'adventure imperative' has also given rise to 'freedom' recreations such as snow-boarding, mountain biking and skate-boarding, commercialisation and professionalisation of outdoor 'sports', and the advent of adventure recreation endurance events. As Zweig (1974:6) argues, adventure myths "throughout the world [seem] largely to be made up of perilous journeys, encounters with inhuman monsters, ordeals of loneliness and hunger, descents into the underworld". These notions of adventure are drawing to New

Zealand visitors from all over the world (Tourism New Zealand website) and recently outdoor 'adventure' education has been utilised as a marketing tool to attract international students to some New Zealand schools (ODENZ website). According to their website, outdoor education offers students "an incredible learning experience of studying in New Zealand's outdoor adventure-land" (ODENZ website). 'Adventure-land' is no place, a wilderness, a myth, without social and cultural history or meaning.

The more recent advent of 'urban adventures' such as those advocated by Project Adventure, Inc., utilising specially designed ropes courses and equipment, continue to focus on the individual largely devoid of a social or cultural identity (Becker, 2003; Brookes, 1991). The emerging field of adventure therapy is a continuation of this frame of reference (see for example Ringer, 1997, Gass, 1993, and to a lesser extent Gillis and Ringer, 1999).

Only recently has debate in outdoor education circles begun to turn to critical sociological inspection of underlying philosophies, concepts and principles. Higgins (2003), for example, reviews recent literature and finds significant concern around the effects of globalisation and modernity on outdoor education. In particular, he notes paradoxical effects in which new technologies help to popularise outdoor activities and consequently change both the nature of outdoor educational endeavour and 'Nature'.

Adventure, Simplicity and Low Technology

The orientation towards the individual in outdoor/adventure education is a direct consequence of the progressive liberal education movement that gave life to education outdoors in the late nineteenth century. According to this strand of progressivism, the education system is an agent of the child, to be adapted to meet individual needs rather than requiring the child to adapt to the system (Blake, 1973; Brezinka, 1994; Hemmings, 1972). The Romantic ideal that was incorporated with educational progressivism imbued outdoor environments with educational value. Rural settings, simplicity in living and Romanticised views of nature have been central to outdoor recreation and education practices (Eichberg, 1986; Lynch, 1999) and are, arguably, also central to modern / contemporary notions of adventure. However, the persistence of the adventure motif may lie in its ability to transcend particular social and historical constructions of 'nature', 'simplicity' and 'technology'. That is, the malleability of adventure ideology may produce paradoxical 'readings' when utilised within the relativities of 'nature', 'simplicity' and 'technology'. The adventure education literature illustrates this.

Common definitions of outdoor pursuits are "self-initiated activities utilizing an interaction with the natural environment, that contain elements of real or apparent danger … " (Ewert, 1989, p6) and "a human-powered form of outdoor recreation" (Priest and Gass, 1997, p18). These types of activities have been at the core of outdoor/adventure education practice. They have in common human reliance on limited material resources while undertaking journeys that (usually) require use of skills commonly associated with 'simpler', pre-industrial, cultures. For Mortlock

(1987), the simplicity of such journeys is a key to obtaining truth, wisdom and happiness. He decries the most modern of adventures as amoral:

> "The advantages of high technology, the 'ultimate' modern equipment and safety devices, tend to be used regardless of the effort and money required to develop them. Such effort and money, perhaps, should be used in helping solve the problems of the millions of the human race who are starving to death, or who are unemployed in increasing numbers. In the same way 'ultimate' adventures are devised which are often both outrageously expensive and often highly contrived ... This style of adventure should be renounced …" (p125).

Mass participation in adventure sports (whether as competitor or spectator) suggests that Mortlock's simplicity has lost much of its cultural value, but it has not been completely overthrown, as recent debate around the issue of technological development in outdoor adventure education indicates (e.g. Wattchow, 2001; Wurdinger and Potter, 1999). Mortlock's call for simplicity is still heard and heeded by some outdoor educators. Barnes (2003) refers to contemporaries who view the corporatisation, commercialisation, and professionalisation of outdoor education as a "loss of idealism", a "leaving behind [of] the values of the social movement that gave rise to the field", and "principles … forsaken and becom[ing] subordinate to the profit motive" (p242). His own previous study had found that the culture and lifestyle of outdoor instructors employed in outdoor centres in the UK in the late 1990s typically revolved around "a rejection of material gain for its own sake" (p245). Barnes' recent research showed that working in the outdoors was seen as a lifestyle rather than a 'job', and the lifestyle was "seen as being removed from a concept of mainstream society" (p245). Mainstream society was characterised as "modern, commerce and hedonist oriented" (p246) in which technology and mass communication have prime roles.

The 'outdoors' is seen as central to adventure education and adventure recreation /tourism because it is relative 'wilderness' and -

> "[w]ilderness is an environment in which people can exercise less control than usual … They must cope with the resources at hand. Predictability of experience is reduced by this lack of control …This element of uncertainty is always present in wilderness, and this ingredient prompted adventure educators to take their students there" (Miles, 1999, p321).

The quest for simplicity and Romanticised views of 'nature' and the 'outdoors' are also evident in tourism in New Zealand, according to Taylor (1998). He concludes that, in the New Zealand setting, tourists seek to "'unwind' the coils of technological – and often 'intellectual' – Time" (p47). The 'wilderness' to which Mortlock, Miles, Taylor, and Barnes' informants refer is also the 'wilderness' in which highly trained athletes, equipped with the latest clothing, navigational, and nutritional technologies compete for glory, prize money and, that most lucrative product, sponsorship, in commercial adventure races. This athletic engagement in adventure contrasts sharply with the co-existing idealism of traditional outdoor education practitioners. Adventure, then, is expressed in multiple ways contemporaneously. It is imbued with values of material simplicity and arduous existence and yet also exists as a

commodified product consumed by those who practice arduous journeying and by those who only seek to project an image of adventuring.

Adventure Commodified: Packaged Adventure in High Modernity

As we have noted above, the dominant explanation of and rationale for outdoor / adventure education is psychological. There is a small, descriptive, literature on commercial aspects of adventure recreation and education (e.g. in Ewert, 1989; in Priest and Miles, 1990 and 1999; Cloutier, 1998), but it is largely functional in intent and descriptive rather than analytical and critical. By contrast, Dumble (2003) points directly to connections between outdoor education practice and "the postmodern condition of economic identity within society" (p6). He "loosens the mask of adventuring discourses" (p12) by illustrating the ways in which education has been corporatised and 'adventure knowledge' has been fragmented and commodified. (see also Humberstone (1995) for a similar analysis). Going further, Foley, Frew and McGillivray (2003) directly associate adventure with commercial activity. They characterise adventure as advocacy of "risk and radicalness – it is the epitome of the new coolhunter consumerism" (p149). These authors argue that, despite a projected image of risk, many adventure recreation activities -

> "are instead consumed in highly rationalised, managed and pre-packaged environments. Although skill is often essential, it is invariably harmonised and tamed by technological developments. As a result, the language of 'risk', 'radical' and 'adventure' has become the fuel of commerce. A mass market has emerged that de-differentiates traditional rural and open spaces, splicing the athleticism and austerity of adventure pioneers with the comfort and convenience of modern consumer culture" (p149).

We argue that, rather than *becoming* the 'fuel of commerce', risk and adventure have always been the fuel of capitalist commerce. Whereas Foley et al. set out to "problematise contemporary discourses of adventure in light of the invading forces of consumer culture" (p150), we argue that adventure is a central pillar of modern capitalist discourse and it is expressed in a variety of ways, including through adventure recreation and education. This gives rise to a paradoxical relationship between adventure ideology (which underlies capitalist economies) and adventure practice (which, in part, seeks to separate the individual from experiences of life in capitalist economies).

Adventure and the adventurer in cultural studies

Michael Nerlich's works (1984, 1987) provide a point of departure as well as an on-going referent for the development of a critique of adventure in history and culture. Nerlich argues that it was the ideology of adventure that brought about and sustained modernity (rather than a bio-physical or racially-inspired "capitalist spirit" (1984, p193). He claims (1984) that adventure has been misunderstood and discredited as a focus of scholarly concern, partly because it has been associated with the Neitzschean idea of the heroic *ubermensch* / superman (see also Bentley, 1947) that was appropriated with catastrophic results by fascist Nazism. Another reason for

adventure to have attracted little academic interest (at least up to the late 1980s) is because it has been closely associated with leisure and leisure aspects of tourism. Leisure itself has only recently become a focus of serious academic concern.

Another who noted with dismay the disrepute into which 'the adventurer' had fallen was Paul Zweig. For Zweig, adventure stories are largely 'transportational':

> "…they beckon us out of the visible, providing alternative lives, modes of possibility. Merely listening to a story – "losing oneself' in it … provides mobility through time and space … " (pp83-84).

This analysis concludes that, in the twentieth century, "a new space has been proclaimed for the accomplishment of aims, situations, and events" – "the space of personal experience" (p245):

> "Wheras older, more humble conventions taught men to interrogate their experience in order to learn the nature of the world which impinged upon them in the form of events and situations, now men interrogate their experience in order to develop an interior geography, which has become the only locus for essential moments …" (p246).

Zweig initially criticizes the common view that adventure can be "explained away psychologically" (back cover) but he limits himself to explaining adventure through literature and does not give much attention to the social, historical, material conditions in which ideas about adventure were developed. He does, however, show how "literature has been the unique footprint of adventure" (1974, p224), a footprint which has both led and reflected exploration and discovery of spiritual space, cultural space, geographical space.

Zweig highlights the cultural utility of the adventure motif, but does not explain why adventure is valued more highly in some socio-historical moments than others. For the moment, it is Nerlich's work that offers a more complete explication of the adventure phenomenon.

Where it has been undertaken, according to Nerlich, analysis of adventure has often fallen short of "a rational explanation for this phenomena in economic, social and ideological reality" (Nerlich, 1984, p193). Nerlich claims that adventure is an "historical constant of modern ideas in Europe and – later – in the entire world" (pp.193-194). He acknowledges that ideas of adventure have existed in pre-Modern times, but argues that Modern European thought is distinguished by

> " … the acceptance of adventure as the aim and the highest value in themselves … it is glorification of the search for adventures as the aim and sense in itself, it is the consecration of the adventurer as the principal hero of humanity, it is the elaboration of a whole system of thinking of the world in terms of categories of adventure, from material production to artistic creation, from sexual life to mathematics" (1984, p194).

According to Nerlich, the modern conception of history "was formulated in order to deal with the ever greater production of the new in modernity, and thus to unmoor us

from any stable and permanent foundation which could hinder the search for the new …" (Godzich, in Nerlich 1987, pix (foreword)). But total unmooring would result in an inability to establish any certainty so to overcome this problem, modernity's conception of history introduced the concept of development. Development allows stability for change (through patterns of action). It also allows continual searching for the new through interpretation and reinterpretation from different perspectives, or master narratives (Godzich, in Nerlich, 1987 (foreword)). Nerlich himself uses one of these master narratives - Marxism - in his analysis of modernity as an ideology of adventure.

Exploring the unknown, searching for what is new, are central characteristics of modernity, according to Nerlich (1987). Searching for the new is done in the name of ever greater forward motion. It provides the means of 'travel' toward the next 'enlightenment'.

A new order – creating wealth through adventure

Nerlich uses both historical records and contemporary literature to describe and analyse the social and economic conditions of the twelfth to eighteenth centuries, the period in which modernity arose and fully developed. His rendition of historical facts accords with that of Hollister and Bennett (2002). A brief overview of these facts is necessary here to preface Nerlich's analysis.

In the central middle ages (1000 – 1300AD), the social boundaries between European aristocrats and their associated knights became less distinct and the material conditions in which both groups lived became more luxurious. In concert with this, courtly life became more refined and exclusive (and often, as a result, financially indebted), although not less military. Out of this grew the shared code of chivalry that has since been romanticised in books and films. At the same time, however, "peasants who accumulated lands" and another emerging class – the royal bureaucrats – joined the lower aristocracy, thus diluting the social position and political power of those born into the petit nobility (Hollister and Bennett, 2002, p336). In reaction to these incursions into their ranks, the aristocracy strove to retain their status and privileges. One way to do this was to "develop chivalry to a point of unparalleled … refinement and splendor" (Hollister and Bennett, 2002, p336). The idea of adventure expressed in noble journeys and battles was an integral part of chivalry, according to Nerlich (1987). He argues that this "courtly ideology of adventure" (p61) which helped sustain the nobility in the dying moments of feudal society and economy in Europe (predominantly in Germany, France and Spain) was usurped by the bourgeoisie. In his words:

> " … the glorification of the knightly *aventure* has as its primary purpose stabilizing a social situation or, concretely, guaranteeing the privileged position of the petty nobility in the framework of the developing princely or kingly courts. The thinking about *aventure* thus serves as the exact opposite of the life of *aventure*; it serves to protect against social risks, to guarantee social privileges, and to oppress or combat the rising revolutionary class, the bourgeoisie" (Nerlich, 1987, pp80-81).

However, the “chivalrous adventure ideology” (“la ideologia de la aventura caballerecsa”, Nerlich, 1984, pp195) of the knightly class also served as an emancipatory tool for the bourgeoisie within the feudal system. Bourgeois interests were served by adopting adventures in commerce as a means to gain wealth, and therefore, social influence.

The ”adventure of discovery” (Nerlich, 1987, p127) added to the “glorification of adventure” (p126) associated with the merchant adventurers. The first merchant adventurers were sea-farers who took the risks associated with long journeys overseas in the hope of gaining wealth from the subsequent sale of exotic goods. Merchant adventurers were considered to be gentlemen, nobles, heroes for bringing home with them the items wanted by buyers / the public (e.g. gold, fabrics, slaves/servants, spices, wealth). They were also heroes for exploring new lands and discovering new materials for home (British, European) markets to use/exploit (Nerlich, 1987). The valorisation of the merchant adventurer helped sustain state / monarchical goals – to increase power and influence in an expanding world.

For the merchant adventurers, the adventure was *with* money as well as *for* money. There was adventure in the physical journey made for money (just as there was for the medieval knights-errant) but there was also adventure (risk, uncertainty) in the investment with money in those journeys for the purpose of trading exchanges. Knightly adventures had been undertaken for money but they had not created wealth at the same time. The merchant adventurers captured money (goods) and created wealth (Nerlich, 1987). (An example of current adventure merchants might be those who foster space travel. Space travel requires the ‘capture’ of a particular technology, with the potential to create future wealth through selling space tourism experiences and even selling ‘property’ in space (for example on the Earth’s moon and on Mars)).

Nation states arose and consolidated from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries and the nobility became increasingly financially intertwined with the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie had created monetary wealth for themselves and so could lend for further commercial gain. Trade became less adventurous in the financial sense because loss of one market (or one ship/ment) made less impact on the bourgeois merchant who had many ships, shipments and markets. Merchants became “modern commercial capitalists” and large trading companies” (Nerlich, 1987, p96).

Popularising Adventure Ideology

Nerlich (1987) claims that the bourgeoisie propagated a dual concept of adventure; the adventurer is the capitalist who ventures their money on journeys and trading (abroad) – but they are no longer actually active in adventuring themselves so have to justify their position as courageous adventurers. They do this by setting themselves up as decision-makers and guides for those who are actually (physically) adventurers, the employees or agents of the capitalist (Nerlich, 1987).

Further, adventure ideology is promoted to advance the interests of capitalism:

> "The praxis of adventure was first the activity of real employees [knights-errant] and then increasingly decays into a suggestive adventure myth for employees [agents of capitalists], which has the function of distracting and appeasing them … For this function of distraction and appeasement, the ideology of adventure invents ever more subtle forms that are based primarily on the [(]originally unthinkable) propagation of the idea of the disinterested adventure for the sake of adventure" (Nerlich, 1987, p209).

The end of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries saw a "spring flood" of 'adventure literature' in England, France, Germany, Holland and elsewhere (Nerlich, 1987, p280). This literature reflected the rise of adventure ideology and "there was no realm of social reality that was not furnished with the label "adventure" and marketed under it" (Nerlich, 1987, p280). Nerlich concludes:

> " … the original meaning of the concept of adventure in bourgeois thought has been transformed into its opposite: from adventure = goods, trade undertaking, and profit, it has come to mean a practical or intellectual deed abstracted from any kind of drive for gain. If the adventurer of the past took risks as a matter of course in order to make profits, struggling at the same time against risk or trying to keep risk as low as possible, we now hear that the adventurer is characterized by seeking out risks. If the goal of the adventurer of the past was to use his adventure, with as little risk as possible, to create the material base for a better, richer, finally also freer life, that carries no weight in the scale of the modern theorist: death would be preferable as a goal. … Adventure will be used in the future to explain why the human being is forced to live so shabbily; the promise of future happiness and the contempt for the present will be used to distract attention from the misery of the present. The meaning of the life of a true man (women are cast in another role in capitalist society) is adventure for the sake of adventure" (p283).

The adventurous person thus became the emotional, courageous side of the rational economic man. Homo economicus became conjoined (or re-joined?) with 'homo adventurus' to produce the 'new man', a true hu/man. In this way, the notions of risk and adventure were cemented into the very fabric of capitalist endeavour and in high modernity / late twentieth century are expressed in commodified form. The appeasement of the employee has become the appeasement of all consumers, perhaps a panacea for loss of faith in progress or development (Lasch 1991). Adventure ideology is thus a continuing expression of a particular social and economic arrangement – capitalism. It has endured several centuries without serious challenge.

One further way of understanding adventure has arisen from recent post-structuralist work and suggests that adventure ideology may be under re-negotiation. Just as the bourgeoisie usurped the adventure ideology of the petty nobility, it may be that a new emerging 'class' (Urry, 1990) is beginning to usurp the capitalist adventure ideology for its own purposes.

Acquiring Adventure: Authenticity and Identity

Foley et al. (2003), and Taylor (1998) position adventure as a commercial enterprise based on buying and selling of products designed as identity symbols. These authors clearly identify adventure activity as part of the capitalist enterprise and hint indirectly at reasons for the recent glorification of adventure. Other authors have taken a different stance on this theme. Becker (2003), for example, suggests that adventure seekers are "hunters of fun" whose quest is "beautiful living" (p95) or authenticity –

> "The often very intense and deep emotional excitement of fear, thrill, pain, surprise, happiness, pride or powerlessness, which can arise during adventurous activities, because of their structural requirements, convey the feeling of experiencing pure authenticity. Since this adventurous search for authenticity is not only hard but perilous, and because it belongs to the mentality of the time to present authentic identities, individuals willingly buy the products of the outdoor and culture industries. However, they don't use these implements to go out for adventures, but as aesthetic signs which allow them to present an identity which seems to be authentic and up to date" (p91).

Authenticity, Becker argues, is "stage managed … by a market of identity creators" (p100):

> "The messages may be aimed at authenticity, but the chosen path to get there is not the one of adventurous self-seeking and self-creation, which is strenuous, but the broad highway of surface stage-management. The desired image directs the choice of which articles to buy … Social acceptance is part of the deal because the lifestyle patterns of unadalterated authenticity and of a constant state of emergency have long been in fashion" (p100).

Authenticity is gained from engagement with the image-production process, Becker suggests, if the process is viewed as constructive rather than manipulative. (In New Zealand and Australia we have found the adventure image commodified in diverse products and experiences, such as clothing, cell phones, beer, vehicles, and church services.) Becker cites Schulze (1999) who argues that as agents of their own identity creation, people engage in playful "staging [of] themselves" (Schulze, 1999, p11, cited in Becker, 2003, p100). Conversely, Becker suggests that authenticity may not be achieved if stage-management is considered to subordinate the individual's "desires and emotions to the general form of goods and the standardised lifestyle" (p100).

The 'stage-management' Becker refers to parallels the "manufacturing [of] adventure" described by Holyfield (1999). Where authenticity is the commodity for

Becker, Holyfield sees an exchange in emotions, but this is not necessarily cast in a negative light. She argues for a constructive view of participants' role in commercial white-water rafting by demonstrating that there is "a continuum between overly rationalized consumerism and felt adventure" (p26). It is in 'felt adventure' that rafting clients go further than simply react to the simulated, or semi-structured experiences facilitated by the raft guides. Being novices in the main, their "novel, extraordinary, and emotionally intense" experiences are just as valid 'adventures' for them as more challenging undertakings are for experienced rafters (p27). Holyfield refers to the "symbolic power emotional exchanges hold" (p27), meaning the symbolism that has significance for the individual alone, and adds that there are layers of meaning within the producer – product – consumer relationship.

Post- Consumption Adventure

There is a further layer of complexity here. The emotional exchanges described in Holyfield's work are based on a willingness to "embrace the rhetoric and rites" associated with the facilitated activity, according to Arnould, Price and Otnes (1999, p56). Here, commercial rafting is viewed as a magical, transformative experience and the river guides are the sorcerers. By way of explanation for the popularity of such experiences, the authors argue that the postmodern condition is one in which changes in social roles and structures force people to create new meanings for their lives:

> "Belief in modernity's rationalizing project may have been shaken by certain global changes in social structure: the spread of technology and industrialization, extreme occupational specialization and uncertainty, withdrawal of social safety nets, and heightened anomie and alienation among the self-aware have-nots in the global economy … People are increasing[ly] redundant in production. Their social role is reduced to that of mere consumers. They are encouraged to retreat from the democratic process and the responsibilities of citizenship. Such trends may contribute to the growth of religious and quasi-religious cults, of resurgent mythic nationalisms, and manufactured ethnicity" (p62-63).

Individualisation of spirituality, life-narratives and destiny in a post-rationalist context, arguably give rise to a demand for "embodied rituals" (Arnould et al., 1999, p62):

> "Dramatic growth in new festivals, rituals and public ceremonials … may signal a magical attempt to invent and inscribe bodies and persons in new cultural traditions. Similarly, the special attraction of ritualized wilderness adventure may lie both in its experiential dimensions and also in the mythic (dangerous, non-commodified) representations of nature in the West …"(p62).

The post-structural analyses of Holyfield and Arnould et al. suggest that adventure is not simply a product of modern material consumption but, at the same time as being consumed, it is also experienced as self-constructed meaning-making.

Understanding the Paradox

If Nerlich and others are correct, then ‘adventure’ is not simply a particular motivation or preference of particular people. While there are, no doubt, reasons why some people rather than others may seek adventure experiences at any point in time it seems reasonable to argue that more is involved in the changing role, social evaluation and consequences of adventuring than simply psychological and social psychological processes. The fortunes of the adventurer – in several senses - are expressions of economic, political and cultural processes. ‘Adventure’, in its many guises and variations over historical periods, has been a central phenomenon in the development of the particular form of the modern world. The paradox is that such a pivotal dynamic is now frequently packaged as a means of transcending the circumstances of modernity. If this analysis has some validity, then the question remains as to whether the contemporary interest in adventuring can deliver on such promises given its fundamental alignment with the development of the modern world?

We contend that adventure may have three distinct yet overlapping roles in modern Western capitalist societies. These roles are at times likely to produce tension while at other times may mutually reinforce each other. First, and following Nerlich’s analysis, it represents what is central to modern capitalism. We propose that in times of change, adventure, despite its focus on risk and uncertainty, is valued for its further function as a source of continuity and stability. If modernity is coming to an end, then it is not unreasonable to suggest that the central features of modernity will be highlighted as we cling to what we know in the face of the uncertainty of the future.

Second, adventure can be viewed as an ideological tool that is promoted in order to foster acceptance of rapid change. The effects of the technological, economic and social changes of the twentieth century have raised some skepticism about the nature, purpose and rate of that change. The logic of capitalism ensures that a defensive strategy is adopted in an attempt to secure the future of the capitalist ‘project’. Adventure, in this role, comes to be valorised as a ‘natural’ human inclination that should be embraced in preference to the supposed non-progressive inertia of pre-modern traditions. In this way adventure helps to align people, emotionally and psychologically with the capitalist dynamic of ‘creative destruction’.

Third, on one reading at least, postmodernity represents an unmooring from the larger social structures that shaped and gave meaning to the modern (Western) world. With this unmooring, adventure becomes available as a vehicle useful to individuals in their personal quests to re-construct and make sense of their own lives. Adventure, that is, comes to be used as a tool of personal agency with which people carry out a project of ‘writing’, and hence exploring, their own biographies (Giddens, 1991).

In conclusion, then, adventure as encountered today in outdoor recreation and education presents an inherent and hence unavoidable paradox. Specifically, we argue that, because of its central role in the socio-historical development of modern Western societies, the notion of adventure can simultaneously function as both the current manifestation, and entrenchment, of an existing social and economic order and as a means of providing opportunities for new interpretations of personal and social reality. This, we claim, represents an interesting and as yet unexplored viewpoint from which to understand the role of adventure in recreation and education. Furthermore, it adds new significance to the future role of outdoor recreation and education in today’s world.

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