Utopian Tourists — Cruising is Not Just About Sailing

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Arguably, all tourists are looking to fulfill dreams that involve some sense of a ‘utopian’ ideal, whether in the ‘arms’ of an ancient civilization or relaxing on a beach, free of workaday worries. Similarly, the growth of ecotourism and adventure tourism represents touristic attempts to fulfill utopian dreams denied the urban resident. For most tourists, these utopian dreams are played out in the year’s annual holiday. Other tourists move beyond the confines of this time capsule because they have no intention of going ‘home’ — their ‘escape attempts’ become a whole way of life. This paper brings together the sociology of tourism and of alternative lifestyles to understand the nature of a utopian subculture, long-term ocean yacht cruising. While by most definitions these people are tourists, in relation to other sociological concepts they are a utopian ‘community’ which espouses not only an explicit social critique but also utopian lifestyle goals. While our notions of ‘utopian’ thinking tend to a collective, not all those who seek utopian alternatives to mainstream society do so within the ‘collective’ community. A social critique and a vision of a better lifestyle can be expressed in more individuated action. This paper shows how a traveller subculture expresses these issues.

When the 36ft sloop Moonshadow sailed up the Brisbane River, two adults and two children looked apprehensively at the huge city towering over them. They had left their home in inner London in part to get away from large cities and had managed to avoid a city anchorage for the past two years. Their cruising aim was always to avoid not only the impersonal city but also the routines that dominate life and work in cities. But, all across the Pacific, yachtsies told them the pile moorings up the Brisbane river were not to be missed, and it did look nice by the Botanic Gardens. But, it was not their idea of Utopia. No, but they could sit out the cyclone season here and do some repairs, provisioning and city sight seeing — and then move on back to the freedom of the open ocean and isolated anchorages.

Introduction

There are travellers who take small yachts and wander over the oceans of the world. Some have no destination goal in mind and others have very clear ideas of where they are going. Many of these people have been ocean cruising for up to 20 years. Of the thousands of people who make ocean passages on their own sailboats only a few see cruising as a whole way of life that they will pursue indefinitely, a life of hardship and insecurity counterbalanced by powerful intrinsic rewards. This is cruising — tourists pursuing a utopian dream. Such sailors are not the only mobile and self-contained tourists but are ‘joined’ on the ‘road’ by yachtsies on short trips, by RV’ers and by seasonal travellers, for example ‘snowbirds’ in North America and ‘loopyies’ in Australia. But, cruisers are different
from most of these in their time frame: it is years (not months) they spend away from home (base).

The objective of this paper is to link utopian thought to tourism by the use of this specific example. To do so, the paper will briefly address some definitional issues before outlining the utopian ideology of this community of travellers. The aim is to reintroduce the genre of utopian thought to the conceptualisation of travel, to the sociology of tourism. At the same time, this paper contributes to filling a methodological gap (Parrinello, 1996: 79) in research into travel motivation by using an ethnographic approach to understanding a complex travel ‘culture’.

A rectangle of sunlight travels back and forth across the chart table to starboard in the space below the bridge deck, illuminating in turn a page of H.O. 214, a plotting sheet on which several pencil lines parallel each other or converge and cross; and a sheet of notebook paper, half covered with all those little figures associated with a morning sun sight and a meridian altitude at noon. There is a swivel chair at this chart table, facing outboard, and looking up from working our noon position I see, for the most part, a pale blue sky and fair weather clouds, as we are broad reaching on the starboard tack. As we roll off each wave in turn the nearest breaking crest of the endless procession that has been overtaking us for days and will continue to do so for days to come flashes above the porthole, or maybe smothers it for a moment in backlit suds. And as we roll to port the patch of sunlight travels across the cabin to hover over a plastic wash basin filled with rising bread dough, resting in the sail bin to port. The sail bin is a good place to let dough rise, because you can nest the bowl into the sail bags at an angle which compensates for the average heel.

The boat is full of sound, although mostly muted: all the rushing noises of the water passing the hull, a sizzling of bubbles, the slap and thud of waves at the bow, the soft, foamy sound of a crest alongside; it all sounds as if we are travelling even faster than we are. From afloat comes the crack of the topping lift against the main; there is a chinking of dishes in the dish rack, the tick of the chain drive of the pedestal steerer over my head. Only the rising dough is silent. A boat at sea, even were we becalmed, is never silent ...

And so it is at sea. At first nerves and novelty stimulate one to wakefulness, but in due course one succumbs to the rhythm of the sea, to the rhythm of life at sea, and except for those rare wild nights, sleep comes as if one had returned to the womb. (Carter, 1978: 1-3)

Utopian Thought

Modern utopian thought, that is from about the 19th Century on, addresses itself increasingly to changing the nature of society toward some ideal; it tries to bring utopia and reality closer together. From the likes of Sir Thomas More, who coined the term in the title of his book *Utopia* in the 16th Century, and later Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888), we move into a rich genre in the 20th century. A bare sampling takes us from H.G. Wells’ *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and Aldous Huxley’s well-known *Brave New World* (1932) through to contemporary
writers such as John Kenneth Galbraith (The New Industrial State, 1967), Theodore Roszak (Where the Wasteland Ends, 1973), Ursula le Guin (The Dispossessed, 1974) and Ivan Illich (Medical Nemesis, 1975). In this literature we find a rich history of ideas and ideals for a better society. But, we also find a plethora of communities that attempt to live their utopian ideal, hence a book title such as From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality (Metcalf, 1995). Thus, if we scan through the utopian literature and if we look closely at the wide variety of utopian communities and non-communal alternative lifestyles that have been established, we inevitably find people with an idea about how life for themselves, their children or wider society could be better. They each have their own utopian vision. Not all of these visions are communal or even community based and not all of us will agree with the details of their vision. Further, few of us would want to live in the ‘community’ they propose, nor within the relational structures suggested; many of us may even feel threatened by the differences we see manifest in these lifestyles and communities. Also, these utopian visions pose physical dangers and such discomforts that most of us are hardly likely to turn our backs on the ‘security’ of urban living. Nonetheless, these utopian visions have a lot to tell us about how we do and might live and they also remind us that we each have our own sense of how life could be better.

Modern utopian thought is often action oriented; the utopian visions are based on a belief that they can be attained and the goals they set are thus not the end of change but a step in continual change in society. In some future state, the inadequacies of the current state may be overcome and we therefore find the utopian vision not only provides a specific critique of existing society but in itself may provide an alternative to existing society. And, of course, many utopian writers and certainly utopian communities are interested in concrete social action, at either the social, political or individual level. This combination of action and ideal is what characterises some small-boat sailors.

Intentional utopian communities, such as communes, develop as people start to question the taken-for-granted structures of their society, of their individual lives, as they begin to question their obedience to the ‘exploiter’, as modern industrial bureaucratic society is perceived. These communities are founded by people who perceive a gap between existing social life and their own ideal and are utopian in that their founders and members see them as coming closer to their ideal society. Thus, they realise their utopian ideal by establishing ‘colonies’, small-scale communities which may set an example for the wider society. As an ‘alternative society’ intentional communities articulate counter-definitions of reality.

Travel brochures often glibly talk of ‘escaping’ but few holiday makers ‘escape’ in the way cruising sailors and communards escape. These ‘escape attempts’ (Cohen & Taylor, 1992) may be illusionary if we accept an analysis of modern society as fully disciplined, as frighteningly but accurately represented by Foucault’s use of the panopticon in Discipline and Punish (1979). If, on the other hand, we reject this fatalistic view along with a postmodernist situational view of mass culture as admitting no personal intervention or escape, then we can allow for the possibility of genuine escape attempts as may be embodied in touristic lifestyles such as cruising. Importantly, this is giving humans a form of agency, if not existential freedom,
that some activate by means of their tourist roles. Whether these tourist roles are
escapist or creative is not important to this analysis.

While cruising sailors do not form intentional and structured communities, they nevertheless have and can articulate a social critique (as will be demonstrated later). Similarly, their adopted lifestyle contains counter-definings of reality. They share an ideology and a praxis and a sense of belonging to a community; they are a subculture (for an extensive discussion of these issues, see
Macbeth, 1992).

As individuals and as a subculture, long-term cruising sailors are part of this modern utopianism because, first, they are primarily concerned with action; that is, they seek to change their own lives to suit the ideal they hold. Second, however, cruisers’ ideal is a part of modern utopian thought by being fundamentally a critique of the society of their origin. The nature of this action and critique forms a later part of this paper.4

Tourists as Seekers After Utopia

There is not the space nor the need here to review the very extensive literature that discusses directly or indirectly the motivation for travel. But in the sweep of thinking from MacCannell’s (1976) search for authenticity through to nature- and adventure-based tourism for personal growth and development, there is an underlying utopian ideal — people are looking for something more and better in their lives, something that enlivens, enriches who they are. Often they are explicitly trying to get closer to nature, trying to reconnect with some idealised view of the ‘primitive’. Expressing it this way consciously ignores the real questions that surround the creation of demand within late capitalism and also the sense that many tourists have only a superficial notion of what it is they are doing or experiencing anyway. This utopian ideal is conceptualised primarily as a ‘pull’ factor; it is part of cruisers’ ‘search’ as identified in the wider research project (Macbeth, 1985; but see also 1988, 1992). The results of this research suggested, contrary to Parrinello (1996:79), that push and pull factors in motivation for long-term ocean sailing are both important but that push are pre- eminent in the early months with pull dominating as the years go by. These pull factors involve a search and the creation of a lifestyle alternative — a utopia. Thus, at some level, they are seeking something in their travels that will enhance their lives. Pearce’s (1988) leisure or travel careers ladder embodies this search, as does the search for ‘mindful’ engagement with the tourist site (Pearce & Stringer, 1991). Arguably, with the social and individual level being paramount in their search, most tourists are not seeking this utopia at other than a personal level (e.g. Lett, 1983).

This paper, however, is not about ‘most’ tourists; it is about particular types of tourists. For, while being primarily about ocean sailors, it also relates to those tourists who are non-resident members of rural communes, who visit Kibbutzim for short periods, who join the traveller trails of SE Asia (Westerhausen, 1998) and who belong to the cruising subculture. They are all tourists who find, even if they did not seek, another view of how society might be organised. They are all tourists who find themselves in what is essentially a utopian script, one that is outside Urry’s post-tourist and which seldom adopts his ‘collective’ gaze (Urry, 1990).
Since then I’ve given considerable thought to the ‘why’ of cruising. For us it lies hidden somewhere in the process of search and discovery, the mixture of action and stillness, the yin and yang of adventure and peace. It involves a gut-level response to the idea that there is something more important than comfort and safety. But until someone can say what that something is, in plain language, I am content merely to note its indescribable existence and to continue to live as if the idea were true. (Payson, 1980: 250)

A reason to study any lifestyle, especially a chosen utopian alternative, is that it increases our understanding of human nature and human life as a satisfying experience. The study of the cruising alternative not only increases our knowledge of society by describing this western subculture, but also provides a protostructural comment. That is, cruising embodies certain structures and experiences which serve as a paradigm for potential changes to work, leisure and tourism activities. Specifically, the study of cruising highlights the roles of autonomy, physical activity, and nature in a conception of the ‘good life’. Of course, their critiques are more fundamental than the anti-structural behaviour of Lett’s charter yacht tourists (1983: 54) who seek only a very short-term ‘break’ from their everyday life.

Paradoxically, however, cruisers’ emphasis on concepts of personal empowerment and autonomy may be dysfunctional in relation to ameliorating the problems upon which their social critique focuses. In the wider tourist discourse, however, the utopian ideals may have direct social inputs through such notions as the Global Classroom (Weller, 1992) and the fostering of better world relationships espoused by (utopian?) organisations such as The International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT).

Travelling in a small boat over great distances of ocean, our sympathies turned readily to life around us — each bird, every fish had meaning for us as an individual inhabitant of our 500 square foot world floating across millions of square miles of potentially hostile seas. We considered ourselves guests of a delicately balanced environment — almost like trespassers in a garden of Eden. All life became more precious. Any unnecessary taking of it was not only senseless, but seemed a challenge to fate itself. There was little chance of successfully completing our voyage without some luck along the way. But I had faith in our practical ability to survive and I was sceptical about our feeling for the sea, calling it first superstition, then sentimental attachment but finally realising it was a subjective reverence for life wherever I found it, above and below the surface. It was a feeling and realisation forced by my peculiar circumstances, but true nevertheless. If it took the risks of a voyage such as this to discover an attachment to life, the trip was worth it. (Cultra, 1978: 74–5).

**Cruising**

To those who dream of long-term sailing, cruising is a romantic life of ease, beauty and sensuality on tropical islands, with luscious jungle fruits waiting to be picked by the vagabond sailor — a bit like Lett’s (1983) charter yacht tourists. To others, often ocean sailors outside cruising, it is a boring life with lack of stim-
ulus, few modern aids to living, a lack of security, and too much time spent wet and cold on the open sea. The mythology about cruising tends to extremes — from trade-wind sailing and anchoring in tropical island lagoons to violent storms and shipwrecks at sea. At its best, though, cruising is a life with freedom and constant challenges, a life where results follow efforts and where one is confirmed existentially simply by surviving. Life is dominated by the ultimate logic of nature where each element of existence flows and merges with each other element. The cruising life is a total and holistic involvement with the processes of living and being, especially while at sea on extended passages (Macbeth, 1988).

At any one time, there are between 500 and 2000 people in the world who can be classed as long-term cruising sailors. Coming from all walks of life and from many different countries they range in age from babies to retirees in their seventies. Not surprisingly, they come predominantly from the western, affluent countries and tend to have a high level of education. While all cruisers have a sizeable asset in their boat, and some have sizeable incomes, most have to work part of each year and look after their own boats (Jennings, 1994; Macbeth, 1985). These are not the yachts you will see in the marinas of Monte Carlo.

The research was carried out over three years using published autobiographical material, participant observation, in-depth interviewing and about 8000 nautical miles of sailing with cruising sailors. The interviews with 59 long-term cruisers (who averaged five years and 28,000 nautical miles of cruising) were conducted in Australia and Pacific island nations.

Cruising as Tourism

There is only a little 'difficulty' in defining cruisers as tourists in terms of the 'passport' definitions that see tourism as temporary travel away from one's home. This difficulty arises from the word 'temporary' but can be put aside when it is accepted that almost all cruisers might be away from their departure port for 20 years or more, they are only temporarily in any given location. In addition, tourism planners such as Inskeep (1991) include yacht travel as a form of tourism that has potential for some locales. However, these definitions do not help us in understanding the tourist role adopted by cruisers, nor its utopian designs.

Cruising may be undertaken as an escape or as a discipline as suggested by Craik (1991) but it is continued as a quest and as a way of designing/defining a lifestyle outside the mainstream (no pun intended). Once cruisers decide to stay cruising they are very much part of Hamilton-Smith's tourism-as-quest (1987: 336–7) especially in terms of the existential dimension.

The existential dimension is relevant because cruisers make clear that their aims and objectives in (creating) the cruising lifestyle include independence, especially from the iterated structures of urban life and occupational imperatives of a 'career'. Along with this is the recognition by cruisers that part of their satisfaction in cruising is the perceived competence — their own ability not only to physically sail oceans and negotiate difficult anchorages (to name but two aspects) but also to 'survive' emotionally and financially in 'cut-off' locations.

However, all small-boat voyagers have two things in common: a love of freedom — for they can go where they will almost unhampered by rules or restrictions, except those which are a part of the seaman's lore — and a
desire to pit their skill, wits, and courage against the oceans in every mood. The mainspring of this activity is, I believe, not the desire to be well thought of by others, but the desire to think well of oneself. (Hiscock, 1959: IX)

John Urry must have been sailing when he coined his term ‘romantic’ because for many cruisers, ‘the emphasis is upon solitude, privacy, and a personal semi-spiritual relationship with ...’ the sea and its coastlines — and with the process of living with the sea (Urry, 1990: 45). In Urry’s terms, cruisers do take a ‘romantic’ gaze at their environment. In contrast, most cruisers abhor the situations epitomised by Urry’s ‘collective’ gaze, which arises and is desirable or created by the presence of other tourists. In fact, cruisers are like many other travellers in not considering themselves to be tourists and will often be inadvertently the object of tourist’s gaze as the latter wander the streets of port towns.

In addressing postmodernism, Urry provides a useful picture of how cruisers of the 1980s were not post-modern tourists. In using Feifer (1985), Urry refers to the post (mass) tourist as one who does not have to leave home to gaze on the usual objects of the tourist gaze because these sites can as easily be ‘framed’ by the TV or video as by the coach or car window. The post-tourists who do leave home also know that they are tourists and that tourism is a game or a ‘series of games with ... no single, authentic tourist experience’ (Urry, 1990: 100). Clearly, cruisers are the antithesis of the post-modern ‘tourist’ who stays to watch the video or enter into a ‘game’ — cruisers are motivated by a desire for activity, to encounter the authentic visceral experience of crossing oceans and living in foreign lands. The thrust of so much analysis of tourism is to the superficial, to the packaged and to the temporary — and cruising is none of these because its utopia is ‘authentic’.

And what were the most important lessons I had learnt from a cruise of two oceans? Unquestionably the outstanding experience was of people: of black, brown and white people. Almost wherever we went ashore we made friends. Previously I had known only people who, like me, had grown up within the framework of a greedy, profit-motivated society in which man [sic] is the product of the immoral pressures that such a society engenders, unconsciously succumbing to the selfish goal of personal gratification. Yet during twelve months of travelling I had met people who had either rejected the profit motive, or did not even know the meaning of it in the economic sense; and they were richer for it — richer not in relation to, but in relations with their fellows. (Isles, 1975: 160)

The postmodern gaze might not distinguish between representations and reality, the ‘hyper-reality’, where the fake is more real than reality, but do not expect cruisers to accept that proposition. Sailing a small boat across an ocean or anchoring through a cyclonic storm is no ‘simulation’, is not ‘virtual reality’. Sailing an ocean is real — it can soothe, it can starve, it can freeze, it can drown you — and it is not faking! And that, too, is also part of its utopian ideal.

Boats and problems are synonymous, everybody knows that. And because of what we call the Rule of Resolve things only break, tear, quit, or let go when you’re using them — every problem is a crisis. Successful long-distance cruisers (even short-distance ones) learn to live with this
state of affairs and develop both the skills necessary to fix most of what goes wrong and the ability to look at the whole thing with a touch of distance and philosophy. Adaptation to the cruising life requires that you come to love self-sufficiency, as we had. But there is a danger here, too, and it is the one that lulled us that morning south of Fiji. It is the danger that you come to believe that you actually are self-sufficient. There’s another way to say it, too, and that is that on that morning we weren’t properly scared any more, and it’s always wiser and safer at sea to be scared. (Carkhuff 1981:47)

Lett’s (1983) description and analysis of charter yacht tourists is interesting when seen in this context. His subjects choose to sail in a rental yacht requiring no preparation by them and in an area known for its benign and predictable sailing conditions. Their search for ‘sun, sea and sex’ and a very temporary (usually one week) break from everyday life bears little similarity to the search by cruisers. It is useful to think of charter yacht tourists as a ‘leisure subculture’ while cruisers form a ‘lifestyle subculture’ (Macbeth, 1992).

Cultural tourism is a term used to cover a multitude of diverse activities and is packaged and marketed as the antithesis to Urry’s postmodern tourist. Cultural tourism has an essentially utopian flavour that includes meeting local people and learning about their lifestyle and culture, travel as personal growth, going to cultural events, viewing the built and natural heritage of a location and ‘seeking authentic, informed, quality experiences [with] individual involvement and varied experiences, rather than organised mass tourism’ (Brokensha & Guldberg, 1992: 3). Cruisers certainly feel this way about their travel and in fact all engage in such activities. If adventure recreation such as white-water rafting is part of cultural tourism, then we can move on from this discourse with cruisers as the archetypal cultural tourist.

The very nature of long-term cruising forces cruisers into closer association with residents and local businesses because of the need to maintain the boat and to reprovision. These activities happen in all ports of call and occur whether cruisers are seeking a meaningful cultural experience or not. Contrary to Lett’s (1983) cruising yacht tourists who have little if any contact with non-tourism-industry locals, cruisers are in constant contact with locals (in both developed and developing countries).

**Cruisers’ Utopian Thought**

C. Wright Mills admonished that ‘social scientists’ foremost political and intellectual task [is] ... to make clear the elements of contemporary uneasiness and indifference’ (1959: 20). Cruisers espouse an uneasiness about modern society which is expressed in their choice of lifestyle — be it leisure, tourism, or not. Cruising is both creative and critical. Cruising is creative because it is an end in itself, it is a way of living that is sought for its own sake because its constituent parts combine to produce a lifestyle which is intrinsically satisfying to the individual. This creativity is their utopian action. But, cruising is also critical in its orientation to modern society. It is thus utopian action and thought.

Cruisers’ social critique is evident not only in what they say but in how they live. This critique develops its vitality from the attempt to live in a way consistent with this critique; in a sense they have made a protostructural, utopian statement
with their adopted lifestyle. That is, they suggest how to restructure life. At the same time, they provide further articulation of their desired lifestyle and also an antistructural critique in telling us what they see as wrong with modern society. This is consistent with the utopian ideals Csikszentmihalyi (1975: 93–8) found expressed by rock climbers in relation to their leisure activity.

Cruisers are people who have made choices that set them on a deviating path that may be seen as resistance to regulation. The choices made are part of taking themselves outside the iterated structures of urban and occupational life. They choose to forego the security of the modern western state with its concomitant regular income, welfare schemes, supermarkets, and health care. Cruisers choose to move out of a situation of relative organisational dependence and control. While these choices are not irrevocable in the long term, they are in the short term; for example, at sea, in isolated anchorages, and even in many ports, the taken-for-granted shopping, financial, health and welfare facilities are non-existent.

Cruisers’ utopian ideal, then, is embodied in the way they live, in these choices; and, in turn, both embody their ideology. The lifestyle can be interpreted as ‘saying’ that modern society is restrictive and saps personal choice and self-determination. When seen in light of cruisers’ aspirations it is clear that they believe that the iterated structure of modern society itself insidiously controls the individual and removes the will or ability to follow natural rhythms and processes. They see modern society as alienating the person from the rhythms of nature, substituting instead the pace and process of artificial creations — payment schedules, work schedules, business hours, lunch hours, rush hours, happy hours, and so on. These artificial benchmarks develop imperatives of their own, imperatives that transcend the individual nature of any single process. That is to say, in combination, the systems that humans supposed design and control take on a ‘life’ of their own, develop their own imperatives and thus control us.6

What did the voyage prove? Many things, I believe. First of all, it proved freedom still exists in this computerised world for those of independent spirit, for there are no man-made restrictions at sea, only the laws of nature. And the endless sea abounds with adventure for all those who wish to challenge her.

It proved ingenuity and common sense are the most important qualities for a successful circumnavigation, more so than experience or a stack of how-to books. (Cultra, 1978: 272)

Most of the utopian statements from these sailors are both implicit in the lifestyle as well as being explicit in what the say and write. However, as a utopian vision there is still more to cruising because of its fundamentally conserving and innovating nature. Cruisers are not consumption oriented in terms of material goods or fossil fuels. At the same time, they are adaptive in their use of both new and re-useable goods. Cruising is a lifestyle populated by people of limited cash flow, notwithstanding a large capital holding. This means that the longer-term cruising people must learn to improvise in the repair and maintenance of the boat and personal gear, the net result being innovation and conservation.7 Similarly,
the cruising lifestyle contains an implicit social critique in its basic functionality. That is, processes and technologies are chosen for function and utility first with aesthetic considerations taking second place and status all but ignored as a reason for cruising. Cruisers' way of living is therefore a statement about how life should be lived (see also Macbeth, 1992). This analysis should not be read as assuming an internal consistency in the ideology nor should the political economy of their wealth be ignored; the purpose here is to use their ideology, their vision, not critique it.

The lifestyle of cruising, then, contains an implicit social critique in relation to such things as material consumption, practicality, self-reliance, and independence. Cruisers reject a materialistic and status-oriented lifestyle that relies on conspicuous consumption. They eschew organisational dependence and the artificial iterated structures inherent in the urban environment and in occupational, especially career oriented, situations. These are issues that are implicit in the lifestyle. But these and other concerns are also explicit in their rhetoric and are now used to fill out this utopian social philosophy.

The social critique of cruisers falls into three broad categories, namely Personal/Social, Political, and Environmental. However, there is a fourth category that underlies the other three — Excesses. This latter is an underlying concern in that the notion of 'too much' or 'too many' or 'too big' or 'too little' appears in an adjectival sense throughout what they say. There is too much materialism, too many people, government is too big, and there is too little diversity in urban life. Government and business are both acceptable as small units but not as big, overpowering institutions that are beyond the involvement and control of individuals. Cruisers believe in ownership and material acquisition (witness the boat and the number of items a seaworthy boat needs) but do not subscribe to the materialistic consumption orientation that fosters a never-ending list of 'superfluous' things that need to be owned. They enjoy other cultures and even occasional visits to large population centres but they believe the world is overpopulated. The diversity of cultures and peoples is good; the sheer numbers are not. Likewise, only a few would argue for the removal of all laws, rules, and regulations but most are unhappy at the increasing standardisation and conformity wrought by highly regulated, bureaucratic societies. In particular, though, they decry the excessive lack of self-reliance and personal autonomy in the people of Western societies. These are all excesses and clearly underlie the three categories of their social critique.

On a personal or social level, cruisers' utopia is concerned with issues of conformity and self-reliance, two sides of a coin. They suggest that the structures and rules of modern society require a conformity to the mass that is unacceptable. They see a loss of self-reliance in this mass society as people progressively lose the ability to act independently of organisations and of the goods acquired to operate in modern society. Cruisers perceive an institutional pressure to conform, they see the iterated structures of urban life as reducing autonomy and independence, of forcing conformity to the ever increasing demands of technological and bureaucratic efficiency.

Their political critique of modern society embodies a traditional liberalism and an anti-military flavour. The 'excesses' theme mentioned earlier is particularly important here because the central concern about Western government is
with its all-pervasive size. Cruisers’ utopia is small scale, non-intrusive and democratic and without war, especially nuclear war. However, on a more subtle level their utopia would reduce the power of the military (industrial) complex. Ironically, while this critique would reject the global dominance of the market economy and global businesses, cruisers depend on this ‘system’ for spare parts, GPS navigation signals and provisioning. Cruisers are not, however, as prone to requiring rescue as high-profile ocean racers.

No utopia can survive environmental degradation through over-population, pollution, and the waste of natural resources. But, while cruisers live in close contact with the rhythms of nature, and a few are active fishers and scavengers, they do not ‘till the soil’ and are thus cut off from this fundamental aspect of nature—planting, nurturing, and harvesting. Consequently, they do not appear to be ‘radical’ ecologists. Instead, they tend to have an immense respect for nature and appreciation of the beauty and power inherent in nature. But their way of life is not independent of industrial production.

Cruisers’ response to modernity is not without ambiguity although certain key demands drive their utopian ideal. They have a sense of their own power as enabling, a sense that they need to and can take charge of their own lives and destiny; self-reliance and independence are key qualities. This involves rejecting materialism, possessions for possessions’ sake, because cruisers’ possessions are designed to suit the ‘doing’ and ‘being’ that is fundamental to their ideal. Their alienation is further reduced because this activity takes place close to nature, is natural, is authentic and is not artificial. Table 1 outlines the elements of cruisers’ utopian vision utilising a simple version of modernity comprising five themes: (1) expertocracy, the control of life by experts and professionals; (2) privatisation, the focus on the individual with private, personal space sacrosanct; (3) alienation, from self and nature and as powerless; (4) centralisation, especially the power of large organisations, including government; and (5) materialism, especially consumerism and a ‘having’ orientation.

In Closing

In closing this paper it is necessary to reaffirm not only the legitimacy of a utopian project, but it touristic or not, but to reaffirm the caveat that not all utopian visions are sustainable nor likely to be universally acceptable. What cruisers’ utopia offers us is an escape attempt ‘in the name of self-autonomy and self-invention’ (Cohen & Taylor, 1992: 25) that may or may not live up to the rhetoric of its philosophy or its discourse. Be that as it may, we have here a world girdling band of tourists who have a utopian vision, who travel to live and live to travel. They contribute to many economies while ‘infecting’ the world with Western values in pretty much the same way as do other Western tourists. Yet it is still apposite to study, with Cohen and Taylor, their escape attempts because this is part of the ‘archaeological’ project, the digging (research) that helps us, in this case, ‘find the spaces for creativity and resistance’ (Cohen & Taylor, 1992: 29). Not all tourists find these spaces in their traveller roles but cruisers do. Their stories, their hundreds of autobiographies, are part of a ‘long tradition of descriptive humanistic literature [that] tells of the art and the psychology of travel, and strangers and their manners, languages, religions, gift giving, lodging, and
### Table 1: Modernity and cruising

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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 1: Expertocracy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliance on experts for advice and service</td>
<td>Reliance on self and peers for advice and service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferral to hierarchy of experts, professionals</td>
<td>Assume equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and institutional dependence</td>
<td>Relative independence of institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow competency range; specialists</td>
<td>Wide range of skills and abilities; generalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 2: Privatisation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private transportation</td>
<td>Private and public transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private entertainment, especially TV</td>
<td>Private and community entertainment, no TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social mobility</td>
<td>No class commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private affluence</td>
<td>Private affluence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual freedom</td>
<td>Individual freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 3: Alienation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness — size, complexity of mass organisations and institutions overwhelm</td>
<td>Powerlessness — over own life; no organisations or institutions have daily power; not a ‘mass’ lifestyle; simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced from nature — loss of contact with forces and rhythms; no long-term experience of nature</td>
<td>In touch with nature — close to nature; long-term and continuous contact with forces and rhythms of nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-estrangement — person as instrumental, as an object viz worker, consumer, sold on the market</td>
<td>Integrated — non-instrumental; not involved intimately in job or consumer market; an active agent not a passive object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 4: Centralisation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked to organisations via, for example, credit cards, telephone, membership</td>
<td>Generally not tied into such systems as credit cards and telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominated by large, integrated centralised organisations</td>
<td>Largely out of reach of, or not related to, large organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual freedom lost in organisational imperative</td>
<td>Individual freedom retained in non-organisational setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 5: Materialism</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriented to possessions, ‘having’</td>
<td>Oriented to action, to ‘doing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic and other-directed or rewarded</td>
<td>Inner-directed, intrinsic rewards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial needs created and contrived</td>
<td>Functional needs, natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privatised ownership</td>
<td>Privatised ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive, achievement oriented</td>
<td>Non-competitive, achievement a secondary result of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High throughput of disposable material goods; life of consumption</td>
<td>Low throughput of material goods; oriented to retention not disposal; non-consumption orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
hospitality' (Graburn & Jafari, 1991: 1; their emphasis). But these utopian tourists go further by also showing us a critique of our own society and an alternative to it. Fair winds to you!

The end of the dry season was at hand, and we were soon to be having wilder weather. Nor was I too happy now in Durban because if you spend too long in harbour your boat is inclined to develop rot — and the crew, too.

It was time, then, to move on, towards the wind and the spray that would soon impregnate Marie-Therese II's sturdy hull with salt, and wash the stains from her captain's soul. I have always had the feeling that these long voyages act upon my system as a thorough cleansing of all the nastiness that accumulates during a period on shore. Once out of sight of the coast, a man is all alone in the presence of his Creator, and he cannot remain a stranger to the forces that surround him. Soon he will be part of these himself, regaining his simplicity and refining himself in contact with the brute forces that embrace him and swallow him up.

And it is, I believe, this need not simply for novelty, but for physical and spiritual cleanliness which drives the lone sailor towards other shores; there, his body and mind are freed from their terrestrial ties and bondage, and can regain their essence and integrity in the natural elements which the ancients deified.

Wind, Sun and Sea: the seaman's triune god! (Moitessier, 1966: 83)

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Notes
1. The label 'loopyies', coined in Broome, Western Australia refers to the penchant for doing a loop/trip around the whole of Australia, a common trip taken over 3–6 months or a few years. These people are often known as 'grey nomads'. Snowbirds are people who leave the cold winters of Canada and northern USA for warmer, snow-free areas to the south. RVs are so-called recreational vehicles, here referring to large motor homes as used in North America.
2. 11.0. 214 is a book of navigational tables used in calculating position in conjunction with astro-navigation.
3. Earlier utopian thinking served primarily as a social and political critique; Utopia was nowhere on this earth. Modern utopian thinking became increasingly action oriented. Hence, the use of 'utopia' in the context of travel and tourism.
4. This is a travelling subculture, or a subculture of travellers. At the same time, the subjects of this paper can be seen in light of the themes being teased out in Touring Cultures (Rojek & Urry, 1997).
5. While the quotations in this paper are from the autobiographical travelogues of cruis-
ers, the analysis is derived primarily from the interview and other ethnographic data (especially participant observation).

6. Some would argue that the key problem with many tours, even 'nature based' tours, is that they themselves rob participants of a relationship to nature's rhythms.

7. This is not to argue that it is sustainable.

8. The 'modernity' column was developed from various critiques of modern western society, including Burch (1971), Camilleri (1976), Faunce (1968), Fromm (1963), Hampden-Turner (1970), Henry (1963), Illich (1973 for example), Josephson and Josephson (1962), Packard (1972), Pawley (1974), Reich (1972), Slater (1970), Vonnegut (1952) and Young (1958). The 'cruising' column was developed from this research.

References


Jennings, G. (1994) Personal communication with the author based on current doctoral research.


