MYTHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF BOATING TOURISM

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Abstract: This paper uses myths present in tourists’ discourse to provide insight about their holiday experiences. Anthropological and linguistic concepts of myth are reviewed and written, photographic and interview data are presented from two contrasting groups of tourists on boating holidays to the Norfolk Broads (UK). Myths were discernible in all three data strands, and relationships between them made it possible to identify tourists’ assumptions among their holiday, which were consistent from group to group and with previously published accounts of experiences. Myths often constrained individuals with unchallenged cultural baggage, but at the same time offered ways to escape these constraints, “personalizing” their experience and resolving inherent conflict at the emotional level. Keywords: Myth, mythology, metaphor, experience, Norfolk Broads, boating holidays.


INTRODUCTION

In a discussion of restaurant service quality Johns and Tyas suggest that individuals perceive and express their experience through “mythologies”. They define these as “generalizations of reality expressed in common terms by groups of individuals”, proposing that such mythologies are used to organize and interpret perceptions and present a novel way to study experiences (1997:474). The present paper explores

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this idea in relation to holiday experiences on the Norfolk Broads (UK).

Two views of myth are relevant here, the anthropological and the linguistic. The former view of myth is a type of narrative “believed to be true by the people who tell it” (Hunter and Whitten 1976:279). In other words, it is a part of primitive religion, cosmology, or worldview. It is related to ritual (Doty 1986) and can function as a justification for existing social practice or belief and a means of defining and maintaining orthodoxy Malinowski (1948). However, a more powerful view of myth is as a conceptual tool, with which primitive people use images from their experience to explain natural phenomena (Lévi-Strauss 1978:22). Mythical thinking is an automatic process in humans: “myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him” (Lévi-Strauss 1978:3), D’Aquili and Laughlin (1979) even claim that it is a neurobiological imperative. One of its key characteristics is the juxtaposition of empirical observation and transcendental (or imaginative) thinking (Lévi-Strauss 1983:6). Myths can be analyzed structurally into elements, or mythemes, between which consistent relationships can be demonstrated (Lévi-Strauss 1979). Myth expresses group ownership of meaning in order to maintain orthodoxy: “In order for a culture to be really itself … the culture and its members must be convinced of their originality and even, to some extent, of their superiority over others” (Lévi-Strauss 1978:20). However, it is at the same time individual property, since members of a tribe differ in their telling of a given myth (Lévi-Strauss 1979:3).

The linguistic conception of myth regards it as a type of speech (Barthes 1973:117). This originates from Saussurian semiology, in which a sign is considered the amalgam of a signifier (the perception of a word) and a signified (the image of the object or concept that the word denotes). For Barthes myth is a second order system, in which the denoted sign becomes the signifier for another level of connotative meaning. This can be seen in Figure 1, adapted from Barthes (1973:117) and Silverman (1983:14). The former gives as example a photograph from Paris Match, in which a Negro soldier gives the French salute. The first order signifier is the photograph and its signified is a-Negro-soldier-giving-the-French-salute. However, the second order signifier is not the actual photograph, but “pictures of that sort” (later in the book, Barthes gives other examples that would have served equally well) which together embody the values of French colonialism.

![Figure 1. The Secondary Nature of Myth](image-url)
Thus, a mythical signifier is a meta-language which reduces the original signifier (here a photograph) to a type or paradigm. As a result, one mythical concept can have a large number of possible signifiers, in contrast to linguistic signifiers, which can only correspond to a single signified (Barthes 1973:131).

Signifier/signified combinations potentially offer a rich variety of connotative meanings, but a myth is produced by a cultural consensus to receive just one of the myriad possible connotative meanings and to suppress the others. Barthes explains this in terms of “form” and “concept”. The form is the denotative sign (or the meaning of the original signifier/signified combination) which in becoming myth is drained of much of its richness by the concept, or ideological content that it has been hi-jacked to express. However, all other possible connotations remain within the connotative signifier: “the meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation …. It is this constant game of hide and seek between the meaning and form which defines myth” (Barthes 1973:126–7).

The extent to which the richness of possible connotations, dormant within the myth, color its meaning, depends upon the individual who decodes it and also on the context of the decoding. Barthes notes that the world of myth is a dynamic one, where mythical concepts change continuously and may be suppressed by history. The form of a myth is not restricted to words or language, and photographs, artefacts, actions, and facial expressions are equally valid. Another characteristic of myth is that it always arises through a motivation or ideology. According to Barthes “… in a language the sign is arbitrary …. The mythical signification, on the other hand, is never arbitrary; it is always in part motivated, and unavoidably contains some analogy … there is no myth without motivated form” (1973:136). Because of this motivation, myth always possesses an emotional quality and Labouvie-Vief (1984) contrasts mythos (μῦθος) the etymological root of myth with logos (λόγος) expressing a dialectic relationship between logic and imagination.

Although Lévi-Strauss (1979:20) claims that “overcommunication” in the modern world has destroyed myth, Barthes notes the ubiquity of myth in the modern world: “In a single day, how many really non-signifying fields do we cross?” (1973:121) and Kim points out that “myths can be found in newspaper articles … advertisements, poems, novels … photography, film TV news, sports … sermons in church or in temples …” (1996:125). Langholz Leymore claims that advertising in modern society performs the same function as that of myth in primitive societies (1975:17), while for Baudrillard advertising aims to maximize members of postmodern society in their consumer role which, he observes elsewhere, is achieved by reconstructing their mythical world (Baudrillard 1990:29–56,38).

Eco identifies such reconstructed mythical worlds with hyperreality: “iconic reconstruction … a perfect likeness” not only physical, but also corresponding to a world of myth which “aims to establish itself as a substitute for reality”. As example, he gives souvenir copies of “the
Manhattan purchase contract penned in pseudo-antique characters, [which] is in English, whereas the original was in Dutch ... it isn’t a facsimile, but ... a fac-different” (1986:4). Baudrillard’s view of hyperreality is still harsher “Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the societal in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral).” This is a third order simulation “of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle” (1988:172). Luke comments that from “the hyperreal sign systems of image-driven informational society ... these circulating tokens with their partial, polyvalent meanings, diverse private codes with more total, univocal meanings enable individuals and groups to construct new personal and partial conventions of understanding for the mythologies of the spectacle .... In work and play, or in public and private, everyone decodes these signs, giving them an individual slant or group style” (1991:11).

Barthes’ discussion of myth represents a “transition from modernist contempt for mass culture to postmodernist valorization of popular culture” (Dekoven 1998:2) because individuals are free to choose between the imposed “ideological” and alternative (i.e., personal) connotations of a mythical signifier. Thus, at the same time as he identifies the mythological straitjacket, Barthes points to a way of escaping it. As Lyotard puts it, “No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee or referent” (1988:15). This position is also reflected in the work of Eco and Baudrillard.

As might be expected, hyperreality has long been a concern of tourism researchers. For example Boorstin (1964) to some extent anticipates the work of Eco and Baudrillard with the idea of mythology-inspired “pseudo-events”. Selwyn makes more specific reference to myths, which like Lévi-Strauss, he defines as “stories assumed to help resolve personal and social conundra of living in such a way that these appear ‘resolved’ at the intellectual and emotional level”. He acknowledges the dishonesty of myths “as vehicles of forgetfulness and ‘failure to communicate with oneself or with others’” and also the power of “overcommunication” (1996:3). Dann acknowledges the views of both Lévi-Strauss and Barthes about myth, identifying magic, euphoria, and tautology as properties of the “language of tourism” and echoing the emotional, mystical, heroic, and fragmented properties of myth identified above (1996a:55,65). Dufour (1978) draws from Barthes’ ideas, arguing that tourism advertising exploits upon archetypes from Ancient Greek mythology, through which tourists also interpret their experience. Dann (1996a) also quotes a number of authors who, like Selwyn, essentially use the anthropological definition of myth as something someone else believes.

There are a number of excellent sociological studies of tourism, not least those mentioned above. However, very little of the material upon which they are based is derived from actual tourists, and this is not always acknowledged. For instance, Selwyn comments “… this introduction has been written principally from the point of view of the tour-
ist and his or her myth-making proclivities” (1996:28) But in fact the introduction and the book itself are overwhelmingly social in conception, dealing with tourist groups or attributing to the tourist an unthinking acceptance of commercially-driven mass culture. The book’s contributors derive their material evidence largely from official, commercial or literary sources. Urry’s (1990) book *The Tourist Gaze* by its title also announces its collective viewpoint, and it, like its contemporaries, uses *tourist* metonymically to indicate not one individual but a class or subclass. Myth is frequently used to distance the sociologist of tourism from the tourist, and the latter’s myths often seem a matter of distaste, for instance: “this is the world of unrealizable daydreams and fantasy, the very fabric of tourism” (Dann 1996b:69).

Therefore, myth is generally but tacitly viewed as communication. The idea that myths are made (by advertisers, governments, media, etc.) in an attempt to impose or maintain bourgeois ideology is a pervading theme of Barthes’ and Baudrillard’s work, as well as that of many commentators on tourism. However, as with all communication, myth also implies a decoding process, and as argued above, individuals are potentially free to decode signifiers in whatever way they like. Thus, they are not restricted to decoding intended messages, and just as anything can act as form for a myth, so anything can be decoded, including unintentional “forms” such as unconscious behavior, random artefacts, landscape, and the weather. In a study of tourist experience it seems appropriate to regard myth, in the light of myth taking (interpretation) as much as that of myth making (communication).

The present paper examines myths used in tourists’ discourse in order to gain insight into the holiday experience. Myths are identified according to the principles of Barthes (i.e., in terms of form, concept, and motivation). The main focus is on interpretation rather than on communication, although the latter is also clearly relevant. The study deals with boating holidaymakers on the Norfolk Broads, because this area has its own character, but is not heavily commercialized. Therefore, it seemed that a rich “ecology” of myths might present itself for study. The Broads were also chosen for their accessibility. Not only was it an easy drive to interview them, but the need to collect and return the hire craft at specific times made it easy to make appointments for gathering data.

**NORFOLK BROADS**

The Norfolk Broads are a wetlands area of Eastern England, well known in the UK as a boating holiday destination. Tourists typically hire a motor cabin cruiser for a week or more, living on board as they cruise the extensive river system inter-linking the “Broads”, a group of shallow lakes which arose from mediaeval peat-cutting activities (Matless 1994). In the present study, access to these tourists was granted by a local boatyard, which hired out self-drive craft by the week. One of the groups discussed here was experiencing a Broads boating holiday for the first time, while the other had been every year for the previous ten years. These two, identified in the text as “Case
One” and “Case Two”, respectively, offered interesting points of similarity and contrast.

Data were gathered in three different ways. One, holiday groups were contacted as they collected their boats, and each group was asked to choose one individual as the main respondent. These individuals were asked to provide, in their own words, and in as much detail as they cared, the best and worst things they expected of their holiday, together with the reasons why these might be good or bad. Two, at this time each group was also given a disposable camera, and main respondents were asked to take photographs which they felt expressed their holiday experience. At the end of their cruise, two sets of photographs were produced (one of which was later sent to the group). The other set was numbered to identify the camera and sequence, and retained for analysis. “Main respondents” were also invited to add captions to some of the photographs if they wished. Three, at the end of the boating holiday main respondents were interviewed about their experiences on an open-ended basis, in the presence of the rest of their group. The resulting material was audio-taped and transcribed for analysis.

Written and transcribed material from the two holiday groups was treated as described by Echtner (1999:50–1), the unit of analysis being story-elements of the type “X is Y” or “X does Y”. The mythical status of these elements was explored in terms of form, as already noted, concept, and motivation (later in the paper, “forms” are identified with speech marks and concepts with italics). Other interesting features included richness or poverty of meaning and contradiction (i.e., any evidence of dishonesty). Resonance between two or more meanings was of special interest, since Barthes notes that this is specific to myth (1973:127). The emotional rather than logical quality of the story elements was also examined, as was the extent to which they juxtaposed empirical observation and transcendental thinking (Lévi-Strauss 1978:3).

Photographs were laid out in their sequence and their framing, foreground, background and principal features were recorded in written form (Collier and Collier 1986:166,170). Questions suggested by Becker were considered when attempting to establish the meaning of each photograph (1978:10). Care was also taken to consider each photograph in sequence and in the context of the other data (Becker 1978:11) in order to optimize validity and reliability (Simco and Warin 1997:663). Textual description of the photographs (which also contained “story elements” analogous to those in the other data) was taken together with the interview transcriptions and the respondent’s written “expectations”, and conclusions about them were tested by returning to each single photograph and to the sequence (Collier and Collier 1986:178).

Case One: First-Time Experience

The complete text of the “expectations” free-response for Case One (first-time boating holidaymakers) was as follows. (1) The things I am
most looking forward to about the Norfolk Broads are: “It was a sudden decision, thought it would be nice, friend was in the Navy and he is involved in sailing on Thames. Fresh air and relaxing holiday. Heard a lot about the Broads. Lots of people had said it would be good fun for adults and kids”. (2) The reason I am looking forward to them is because: “I want to relax and take in the easy life. Spend some time with the kids!” (3) The things I am most concerned about my visit to the Norfolk Broads are: “Safety for the kids [main reason] Crashing the boat [hence were well insured]. Not doing this before, maybe driving the boat, mooring at night. The weather!” (4) The reason I am most concerned is: “I’ve never done this before so its a new experience”. Thus, responses were quite detailed, despite the limited space available on the questionnaire and the time-constraints upon the respondent.

An important theme of this response was uncertainty about the benefits of the holiday, signified (the mythological form) by the word “it”, which although ill-defined was rich in meaning. It set aside an unknown, “virtual space” (the mythological concept) which the respondent wished or hoped to fill with experiences or activities. It also expressed the otherness (Brown 1996:36) of the impending holiday and the respondent’s perceived strangerhood within it (Dann 1996a:12). “It” expressed his emotion (anxiety in the face of the unknown) yet at the same time remained extremely nebulous. The motivation for this myth seemed to be an assertion of inexperience as an alibi, so that if anything went wrong it should not be the respondent’s fault.

The respondent evaded responsibility for the decision in two ways, by drawing on the verdict of unspecified “others”, who took on mythic form through their number and hence paradigmatic nature: “lots of people had said”. He used similar devices: “friend who was in the Navy”, “sailing on the Thames” to invoke external authority and vicarious experience. Another reading of these elements is that they provided potential “differentiation” (Cohen 1972:164) since the (still mythical) authority figure appeared to provide a safe respite from the alien and perhaps threatening holiday image “it”. Other mythical forms relating to the holiday-to-come: “spend some time with the kids” and “good fun for adults and kids” were couched in the typical language of holiday advertisements. Their concepts were those of “commonsense” and popular culture (i.e., quality time with the children, enjoy yourself on holiday). These seemed to state holiday goals and ideals, but their triteness hinted at insincerity, in effect reducing the signification almost to nothing. Relaxation (mentioned twice) and “the easy life” were similar “popular” forms and concepts, but “take in” seemed to be the respondent’s individual view that “the” easy life (assumed to be “out there”) could be absorbed as part of the holiday experience. “Fresh air”, a less trite form, carried connotations of “novelty” and “movement” (through “air”) acknowledging the potential and positive otherness of the coming experience as well as the anxiety-laden freedom of “it”.

In contrast to the flexibility and depth of the potential benefits, the respondent provided very specific negative aspects, which by their
ready availability underlined his anxiety of the unknown. These signifiers were clearly the respondent’s own, but separately did not amount to mythical forms. Together, however, they represented “the sort of thing” (paradigmatic form) that “always” spoiled experiences. Certainly their priority order seemed to mirror the responsibilities and proprieties of everyday life: the kids, the boat (property), mooring (place), the weather (adversity), from which the holiday “it” otherwise offered an inscrutable withdrawal. “I” in the final statement inscribed the respondent into both the virtual space and the potential danger, emphasizing his vulnerability to both. He had committed himself and from here on the benefits had to be realizable and the anxieties neutralizable.

The camera surrendered by this group had taken 15 photographs. The first two were dominated by two riverside public houses at Horning, the Ship and the Swan, respectively, in tidy gardens set with tables and umbrellas. However, the second was noticeably further from the boat, across an apparently widening expanse of water. In the next (number 3) a group of new houses on the river bank appeared almost in the background across a widening expanse of river and marshland, with some moored boats. This was followed by three (numbers 4, 5 and 6) taken from the respondent’s boat and showing views across the bow or stern, with the respondent’s children in full or partial foreground view. The background, which occupied a large part of each frame, showed respectively an empty expanse of water and sky, a smart house, waterside garden and moored boat, and pleasure craft and a wooded shoreline. Number 4 (Figure 2) was of special interest, because the photographer seemed suddenly to grasp (apparently through the eyes of his children) the beauty and significance of the wide Norfolk landscape. In number 6 the children’s faces could be seen; two of them smiling, perhaps on request, as they were also giving a “thumbs up” sign, while a third scowled. Number 7, taken from the bank, showed “G” at the helm with two of the children sitting on the aft cabin roof.

Figure 2. First View of “Freedom”
The water itself could not be seen, but in the background was the river bank, lined with trees.

A series (numbers 8–11) showed other boats: sailing boats and cruisers in apparent convoy, overtaking the respondent’s boat or moored together. Number 12 had all four children feeding ducks and a swan from the stern of their boat, which was moored to a concrete jetty. The background was an open expanse of reeds and blue sky with wispy cloud. Number 13 showed an open, flat landscape, with a few distant trees, a wide expanse of water, with an isolated boat moored far away on the grassy river bank opposite. Number 14 showed a “touristic” windmill (possibly at Horsey) with newly painted white sails and cap, rearing above a stand of trees set back from the river bank, with the river and sheet-piled river bank in the foreground. The upwards-directed shot managed to capture a wide, blue sky with wind-driven clouds. The last in the sequence presented an open landscape of reeds and fields. Light reflected from a dyke and towpath, which led from the immediate foreground away into the distance, where a tiny, windmill could just be discerned.

The photographs had an air of naturalness and did not seem to have been contrived or “posed” for the camera. Each seemed to be an individual perception, rather than a communication to the viewer, and as such the separate photographs were quite difficult to analyze. The sequence, however, told a discernible narrative, in which at first buildings in the initial shots (representing townscape and everyday life) gave way to water and fields. After this, boats increased in prominence. People (“the kids”) were featured in a few of the early/middle shots and wildfowl (“nature”) in number 11, but in the final shots all of these subjects of buildings, boats, and people gave way to the open, flat Broads landscape in which solitude was paramount. This pattern can be seen by plotting the areas occupied by key elements against the sequence numbers of the photographs as in Figure 3.

The two public houses introduced a “boating” theme, through their names and waterside location. As the sequence progressed, this was
taken up by shots of boats, including the respondent’s hired craft, which seemed to develop the theme of a holiday boating community. Numbers 4–7 and 11 included the respondent’s children (no other people were shown) perhaps as evidence that holiday goals (“spend some time with the kids”) were being met. Especially in numbers 6 and 11 there was an attempt to show the “kids” having “fun”. The significance of ducks and a swan in number 11 was possibly to represent “nature”. Numbers 13 and 15 expressed an overwhelming solitude of water, land, and sky. By their position in the sequence they gave an impression that they were the respondent’s true holiday goal.

In the Case One interview, “Freedom” appeared as both a form and a concept. It seemed to imply many of the positive aspects of the concept signified by “it”, a word that would have made no sense in the interview narrative. “Freedom” was specifically mentioned seven times, in two contexts: being able to journey at will and avoiding the trappings of everyday life (i.e., attaining otherness).

Respondent: … you can go wherever you want. I mean [pause] you know. Once we had got into the routine of mooring and the freedom of mooring and knowing where you wanted to go and just walking out and freedom from the telly and all the freedom from everyday life.

“Freedom” is a popular mythological concept, which appears frequently in the mass media synonymously with “good”. The form it adopted in this excerpt was a perceived ability to drive about and moor at will, evidently achieved by a suspension of the respondent’s disbelief. One patently cannot go wherever one wants on the Broads, where access is restricted by numerous silted regions, nature reserves, private waterways, private Broads, and private moorings. Another form of freedom was the absence of “the telly”, a signifier of the alienating modern condition, from which the respondent clearly felt himself to be escaping. However, the actual location involved was another popular mythological concept:

Interviewer: Where was this freedom that you felt?
Respondent: Well, nature really. I mean you got all the nature. It was quite nice looking at some of the natural things. Some of the birds along the route and that. It was really good. Yeah.

“All the nature” and “some of the birds” are clearly forms meant to signify an unspoiled environment. In fact there is very little “natural” about the Norfolk Broads, which were dug for mediaeval peat workings and are bordered in a large part by farmland and holiday homes (Matless 1998). Thus, these signifiers actually signified little more than an absence of cityscape. The comment “quite nice” struck an odd discord with “it was really good. Yeah”, so that the artificiality of this fabricated “nature” was admitted at the same time as the expressions of rapture. The word “nature” occurred eight times during the interview and the concept was typically signified by “wild” water birds (such as the ducks and swan in shot number 11):

Interviewer: In a few words what does the Broads mean to you now, after a week away?
“G”’s wife: Wild birds

Respondent: Yeah I mean the wildlife really was perhaps for me the [pause] Yeah. The dominating factor [pause] was the wildlife. But the wildlife, the nature around here is second to none [pause] It really is [pause] and when its nice weather getting upon the top of the boat, sitting there and relaxing. It means a lot really.

Together “wildlife”, “wild birds”, and “nature” provided a form signifying the otherness of the holiday situation and feelings of freedom. The poignancy of the myth can be seen in the assertion that these things were “second to none”. Although there are still wild and beautiful areas of Broadland (Matless 1994:146) this statement still seems to ignore the over-used waterways surrounded by farmland and jerry-built holiday chalets (Matless 1998) which characterize much of Broadland. The motivation behind these myths was apparently to reconcile the respondent’s feelings and ideals about the holiday with its reality. They stood in stark contrast to comments about the boat, which prima facie also offered a potential signifier for both the realization of freedom and the holiday situation. It was actually described in quite a different way:

Respondent: Oh, lovely boat. I think it is a really nice boat yeah. We seemed to have everything that we needed. I don’t think anything was missing really.

“G”: I mean, it would be nice if they had given us a pair of binoculars for example. We could have done with more bits of rope ....

Hire craft from this boatyard were equipped with many modern comforts, including a television and refrigerator, so this statement of contentment was at odds with the “freedom from the telly” alluded to earlier. As in his other statements, the respondent was able to go back and forth at will between his perceptions of otherness and of the “real” world, of which the boat was an ever-present reminder.

Expectations of “time with the kids” and “fun for adults and kids” were not borne out by the interview statements:

Respondent’s wife: ... we had the two families and the children kept each other happy so we [pause] had a lot of time to ourselves as well ....

The children’s desire for entertainment also conflicted with the adults’ desire for “freedom from the telly”. This mismatch between the desires (and presumably also myths) of children and adults was perhaps responsible for the wry look of one child in shot number 6:

Respondent: The kids! I mean the kids sat in here watching videos some of the time [tone of astonishment/resignation].

“G”’s wife: During the whole week they have had two videos, no television at all. That’s quite good I think [laughs].

The question whether they had brought any special equipment for the holiday produced further insights into the boating/sailing theme of the photographs.
Respondent: No, but “G” [his companion on the boat] brought a microscope and some binoculars.

Interviewer: Microscope?

Respondent: Yes, to have a look at some pond life. Some pond life, and things like that.

Interviewer: Is he [“G”] a scientist?

“G”: No, he [the Respondent] is the scientist. I’m the sailor.

This seemed to extend the community of boats implied by the photographs, into a “shipboard community” differentiating those who took the role of “sailor” from the respondent, who did not wish to sail. Rather than being a passenger, the presence of scientific equipment (form) “allowed” him to become a “scientist” (concept). The sailor (and hence scientist) role was further supported by the fact that “G” had been in the Navy. The “scientist” role was also an excuse to avoid risking “crashing the boat”:

Interviewer: Are you still concerned about crashing the boat and driving it?

Respondent: Well, I didn’t hardly do any of that, I left it to these.

“G”: We did all the crashing that was required [Laughter].

Respondent: I took it this way. The two ladies on board and “G”, they quite enjoyed doing it, so I left them to it. It doesn’t really concern me driving a boat because I find it a bit frustrating going at only four or five mile an hour [laughs]. It’s a bit slow for me.

The roles were further signified by “do any of that” and “I left it to these” (forms signifying “sail the boat and be a sailor rather than a scientist”). The sailor–scientist combination also had a connotation of “exploration”, as in the voyages of Darwin, Cook, and the USS Enterprise. Thus, the microscope and binoculars not only excused the respondent from driving the boat, but lifted the whole holiday onto the plane of a “voyage of discovery” and “boldly going forth”. The otherness of the holiday was to some extent “explained” (as the expected experience of an explorer) but at the same time it was clear from “It’s a bit slow for me” that the adventure was in fact a game, which could be justified out of existence at will.

“Relaxing” (mentioned five times in the text) was ascribed by three members of the party to this slow pace and “just chugging along”. However, the respondent seemed to find it boring rather than relaxing. At the end, he commented with a laugh: “For me personally, a week’s enough”, relegating both the relaxation and the adventure to “play”.

The respondent was able to give a thorough account of their route and itinerary:

Respondent: Yeah. If I can remember [laughter]. We went from Bec- cles up to St Olaves past [pause] Braden Water. Up to Stokesby. Right up to Wroxham Hoveton, Coltishall and then basically back that same route, except we came [pause] through the River Yare [and] Right. Yeah that’s right up the River Ant and then back. Back via the canal, and back to Beccles. So we’ve been quite a way.
This litany of places served as the form for another myth, signifying “activity” through which the holiday was consumed and experienced. The long list echoed Eco’s (1986:7–8) postmodern cult of more, as did the feeling of distance in “right up” to Wroxham and the River Ant. The signification was one of authenticity: a “real” journey, where no half measures were taken, a veritable “voyage”, laden with excitement worthy of the holiday experience. However the lameness of “quite a way” brought the “voyage” back to the real world with a bump, showing that the respondent was always aware of the artificiality of the voyage theme, and recalling his ambivalent attitude to “nature” discussed above. This was the resonance between the myth and the actual meaning of its hijacked signifier which Barthes (1973:127) identifies as typical of myth. The resonance also permitted “differentiation” of a kind, since the “voyager” was able to leave the otherness of the voyage at will and spend some time in his “real” mental world. The motivation for this myth seemed to be a need to show that a “proper” holiday had been had, replete with the expected things: activity, conspicuous consumption and excitement.

The community of boats apparent in the photographs was not experienced as a community of boaters. There were no positive comments about other holidaymakers, but three negative ones about crowds and irresponsible behavior, for example:

Respondent: … but what we did find, there were a lot of people going far too fast on the [pause] ways, and we tended to have the wash, and the wake that they were making was quite unbelievable.

This “lot of people going far too fast” was also a form, in this case signifying negative properties of the holiday. Speeding apparently needed to be associated with many people, although they were strictly related to this negative form and the concept of a holiday spoiled by the selfish behavior of [many] others. Elsewhere, the respondent commented that there were actually “not a lot of people around”. The motivation seemed to be to challenge the positive aspects of the holiday and justify his earlier pessimism. The interview also demonstrated how negative expectations were faced and overcome:

Respondent: I am still a bit concerned about (the children’s safety), but that is perhaps my nature. My kids can swim and “G” knows their kids can swim but I am still a bit [pause] wary. We made certain rules and regulations if they went outside the boat. They had to wear their buoyancy aids. Wroxham Bridge was a bit [pause] hairy so to speak. “G” did a great job getting us through there, [but] we decided to take a pilot on board on the way back, and he certainly had a concern about it.

The form here was possible dangers (to the children), which the respondent seemed to set up in advance (see “expectations” above) in the hope that the majority of things which could have gone wrong (the concept) would be averted. Thus, the motivation was to achieve satisfaction by facing these problems successfully. The same motivation could be discerned behind the Wroxham Bridge episode, which the respondent clearly saw as a possible danger, although it seemed a non-
sequitur in his narrative. “Hairy” (rather than “dangerous”) conveyed excitement rather than peril, emphasizing the counterpoint of negative and positive forms (and hence experiences). This myth again justified the respondent’s initial pessimism, but through its concept of adversity overcome, it also helped imbue the holiday experience with an epic quality. Elsewhere, members of the party expressed relief at the week’s good weather, but the respondent’s original anxiety persisted, expressing his ambivalence about the holiday:

Respondent: Well, I think it was just a new experience. The whole thing was a new experience. Because, I mean, I had never been on a boating holiday before .... I do believe you have to have the weather. And I really believe you need to have [pause] the freedom to moor [pause] and not with a lot of people around. I think in summer it’d get a lot busier and I wouldn’t enjoy that. I don’t think I would come in the summer here.

There was a sense of getting away with an enjoyable holiday, despite all the potential for disaster. However, “a lot of people” seemed to belong to another, more potent category from the other worries. It seemed that this respondent perceived “freedom” as having the Broads to himself, over and above escaping from his worries. His enjoyment was ultimately related to a scarcity of other people, echoing the final, lonely “goal” of the photographic sequence. The Broads experience gained otherness through being an unaccustomed type of holiday—an escape from the “usual escape”:

Interviewer: How does this rank as a different holiday?

Respondent: It is novel. [big sigh]. It’s a different experience for me going on a holiday whereby you’re still in command of your own destiny [pause] so to speak.

“Command of your own destiny” was a very strong way of saying that the respondent could go more or less where he liked (among the fields and holiday homes) as long as he kept to permitted waterways and moorings. However, this form was clearly related to other signifiers that he used: “freedom”, the “hairy” bridge negotiation, “right up the River Ant”. The motivation was to imbue this relatively prosaic holiday with self-discovery, which the respondent felt would not have been available if he had been herded about, as he was (presumably) accustomed on package holidays.

Case Two: Experienced Holidaymakers

The Case Two group of experimental holidaymakers cited their free response “expectation” quite differently. The things I am most looking forward to about the Norfolk Broads are: “Beer and pubs, Relaxing holiday and way of life, everything is in the slow lane on the Broads. The unique landscape. We enjoy the boating holiday”. Completing the questionnaire was a very rushed affair, during which the group excitedly colonized the comparatively cramped quarters of the boat. The respondent wrote only a few positive comments and left the other
space blank, saying that he was unable to think of anything else, especially negative things.

Given the group’s long experience of such holidays, one might expect a stream of specific ideas, both positive and negative, about what would be encountered. Instead, most of the questionnaire was taken up by white space. Barthes notes that “the absence [of a form] will become sufficiently objectified to become legible” (1973:128) but here one hesitates to afford this the semiotic significance of text. Nevertheless, the space may have had some connotation of potential or opportunity, somewhat equivalent to “it” in Case One.

“Beer and pubs” as a form had the typical “things like that” quality of a mythical form, apparently signifying a holiday experience characterized by cheer, sociability, and some degree of drunkenness. “Relaxing holiday”, a clichéd mythical form shared with Case One, was likewise probably derived from advertising or popular culture, suggesting a holiday as it should be. “Life in the slow lane” (form) was a pun-like derivation from “the fast lane” of common usage, perhaps restricted to this group or their immediate circle, and apparently only adding emphasis to the relaxation concept. “The slow lane” and “unique landscape” also connoted otherness, from which strangerhood was banished by “we enjoy”, showing that the otherness was to be enjoyed from within the safety of the group. Despite its motorway connotation, “slow lane” also invoked something of a “natural”, old-fashioned world, through timeless, narrow, winding country roads. The motivation for these myths seemed to be to set the stage for a holiday in which otherness would be experienced from within a social setting modified by “beer and pubs”. The striking absence of anxieties and negative expectations showed that no negative forms were associated with this holiday and the expectation was of an otherness that could be controlled.

This group’s disposable camera had taken 13 photographs, a sequence which began with shots of Norwich Cathedral. Number 1 was a rather dark interior shot taken looking upwards to stone vaulting and a huge crest of the lion and unicorn. The next one also looked upwards at a section of exterior wall, showing Norman arched windows and decorations, and a freshly painted “antique” clock, not quite centered. Number 3 showed mediaeval, half-timbered houses, with, to the left, a particularly crooked and picturesque house. This shot was taken close to the Cathedral (in Tombland, Norwich) and with a similar upward perspective. It contained an expanse (ca. 40%) of blue, partly clouded sky and seemed to be slightly contrived. If more carefully taken it might have been a “postcard” shot. Numbers 4 and 5 were almost identical and perhaps the shutter was operated twice by accident. They showed a cruise boat (perhaps the respondent’s) moored outside a boating service station, across an expanse of water. Other boats were moored in the background, to the rear of the service station, under a bright, but clouded sky. The next shot showed the ruins of St Benet’s Abbey, set in a “typical” Broads background of sky and flat fields. A small part of the boat and an expanse of water were visible in the foreground. The Abbey ruin was halfway down the frame and about one third from the left, the sky blue with white clouds.
Number 7 (Figure 4) showed a duck walking on the rear of the moored boat, in the foreground two mugs of tea were visible next to an open hatch, and the background was open marshland and overcast sky. The next photograph showed the windmill at Berney Arms, set among trees and garden, about 40% from the left hand side of the frame and occupying 90% of its height, in another “postcard” shot, with a bright, lightly clouded sky occupying about 60% of the area. Number 8 showed members of the group aboard the excursion boat “Electric Eel”, moored in a calm backwater among lush vegetation, apparently about to cast off. Two of the group were smiling as if enjoying the trip.

The next shot was an upward one of the “Vintage Broadsman”, a pleasure boat in the style of a “paddle steamer”. The bottom part of the boat took up nearly half the shot, above which was the top deck, where passengers sat in the sun, apparently looking intently at something in front of them, out to the left of the frame. The background was tree-lined river bank and a blue sky with a few clouds. In this shot, the heads of the passengers bisected the frame horizontally and the paddle wheel was about two thirds from the left hand edge. Number 11 showed six members of the respondent’s group seated together in the aft cockpit in bright sunshine. An older man (seated) was talking to a young girl (standing) perhaps warning her to take care. The four others smiled at the camera and a young man wore a horned plastic Viking helmet. The background had river, fields and a distant line of trees under a blue sky with wispy clouds. Number 12 was a close up of the young man of the Viking helmet, at the helm of the boat, smiling but with his mouth open as if in the middle of a joke or repartee. He wore sunglasses, a red and white baseball cap and a black tee-shirt, with the words “One too many and you might turn …” printed in white across it at a rakish angle. The background was very similar to that in the earlier one. Number 13 showed a larger group, in which figures from earlier photographs (numbers 9 and 11) were recognizable. To
the left of the group sat the researcher and at their right was an uprooted lavender bush.

A plot of the areas occupied by key elements in this photographic sequence is shown in Figure 5. In this photographic “narrative” buildings dominated at first, giving way quickly to background landscape and sky as in the Case One sequence. Boats then made an appearance, with a “mention” of wildlife (the duck in number 7, indicated in the figure by an arrow). A significant difference from Case One was the increasing presence of people towards the end and “culmination” of the sequence. Unlike the series obtained from Case One, this contained a significant number of contrived shots. Numbers 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 10 were all of obviously “touristic” subjects. In all of them the attention-focusing centers—the crooked house itself, the Cathedral clock, the windmill, the paddle of the Vintage Broadsman—were all located half way down and about one third horizontally from one side of the photograph. There was a noticeable “picture postcard” feel about them. Numbers 11, 12 and, to a lesser extent 9, featured members of the group posed for the camera. These nine photographs were clearly intended as communication, either with the researcher or with friends and family back at home. Even the less “posed” number 7 (Figure 4) seems contrived, with its mugs of tea. These contrived photographs together provided a paradigm of touristic photography (the form of a myth). The concept seemed to be of sightseeing, or wish-you-were-here. In contrast with Case One, the motive was to present the occasion holiday—like in terms the viewer was expected to understand.

Interestingly, the Case Two photographic sequence contained not a single shot showing pubs or the consumption of beer, the principal holiday “expectations”. It seemed that the group felt such subjects would conflict with their viewers’ expected holiday proprieties. The only (oblique) allusion to drinking was “one too many” on the young man’s tee shirt in number 12, taken in such a way that the allusion

![Figure 5. Analysis of Case Two Photographs](image)
remained with him and not with the group as a whole. Nor were there discernible photographic references to “relaxing holiday and way of life” or to “life in the slow lane”. However “the unique landscape” was featured extensively as background, perhaps as evidence of the holiday’s location. The allusion to group and community (“we enjoy”) in the expectations was reflected in several photographs of the group and its members, which seemed to be the culmination of the sequence.

As in the Case One sequence, boats took up an increasing proportion of the middle shots, but here there was no sense of a boating community. The respondent’s own boat dominated and others shown were either vehicles for showing the group (in the “Electric Eel”) or “sights” (the “Vintage Broadsman”). Nor was there any sense of differentiated shipboard roles. The duck on the respondent’s boat in number 7 seemed to express the encroachment of “nature”, the two mugs of tea in the foreground testifying to human presence. When the group were asked to comment on significant shots they added the caption “No orange sauce for me, thank you very much” to this one. This trite culinary signifier stressed the duck’s freedom to escape and, therefore, its greater “authenticity” in being voluntarily on their boat.

This group’s interview reflected their previous experience of Broads holidays. An example of this could be found in the “equipment” they brought with them, which included two-pence ($0.03) coins for gambling games, personal mugs (a little personal territory in an alien world) and water pistols. They also expanded on their expectations, acknowledging a feeling of setting off on an adventure:

Interviewer: What was your feeling when you cast off at the beginning of the trip?

Respondent: [after short discussion with the group] We were ready for an adventure [pause] that was what the feeling was. We were ready for an adventure. The adventure starts.

Thus they had a richer expectation of the holiday than was implied by their written expectations. Adventure seemed to be a personal form, not directly derived from advertising or popular culture. The concept it provided was a virtual space comparable to “it”, but palpably more enjoyable, controllable, and freer from anxiety. This also seemed at odds with the slot machines and water pistols; there seemed no connotation of discovery or exploration. A discussion of the itinerary displayed pride in the amount of ground the group had covered and at the same time reintroduced the “beer and pubs” theme of the Expectations.

Respondent: ... we’ve been all over. We started off at Beccles, and we’ve been round the River Waveney. We stopped off at Burgh St Peter at Saturday lunch for a couple of beers. [child laughs] We had a couple of beers and moved off [laughs] basically up again up the River Waveney, across the New Cut past Reedham, up to Reedham Ferry for Saturday evening. Which at Reedham Ferry we had a barbecue didn’t we, something to eat and more beers, more beers. [seeking to amuse rather than answer directly Granddad laughing] and another beer [More laughter].
“All over” was clearly the form for a myth very similar to that of Case One, signifying the concepts of “activity and getting the most from the holiday”. The need to authenticate the journey through the thoroughness of the itinerary also recalled the account of Case One. In fact the group clearly did not go everywhere, and were happy to admit this elsewhere: “We missed Stokesby out and one or two other places didn’t we, on the way up [the Bure]”. Beer was mentioned 18 times throughout the interview and pubs 12 times. Together they constituted a persistent and important mythical form. The concept they signified was associated with amusement, almost embarrassment, revealing an ethos which regarded pubs as potentially “wicked”:

Respondent: … went back to the boat, had a barbecue and a beer. Most unusual for you isn’t it? You must think we’re drunks [laughs]. We’re terrible folks but of course you must remember we are on holiday.

“Terrible folks” reconfirmed the wickedness, the relish and at the same time the embarrassment. At the end of the interview the paradigm was broadened by drawing in the interviewer as a “co-conspirator”:

Respondent: … we moored up here [pause] and went into the village to see if the pub was still there and if we could see yourself, and lo and behold we bumped straight into you, but we did notice you had been to the Pub before we had [laughs]. So I’m not saying too much about that ….

Although this reinforced the myth, the wording of its forms was also playful and the embarrassment seemed to resonate between being authentic and assumed. In addition, it was clear that pubs played an important social role in this holiday. They were a frequent source of family meals and everyone participated, including the children:

Respondent: we went across to the pub and had a few more beers.
Child 1 … We played pool.

Respondent: … Yes we had some games of pool which you had never played before, and you thought it was wonderful didn’t you …

Respondent: We came back down the River Thurne. And we went into Ranworth [pause] and we went and had a beer there didn’t we? Yes. And we had some chips didn’t we? While we were there [pause] we had two bowls of chips, a game of table football, a game of pool and [pause] then walked up to the church and climbed the tower.

Thus, the meaning of “pubs and beer” resonated between “wickedness” and “family-community” recalling the oscillation of “exploration” and “nature” between credibility and insincerity in Case One. In “pub life” could also be seen a counterpoint and alternative to “church”, which seems to have acted as an important social focus in “everyday life”:

Respondent: … and then rose on Sunday morning. Didn’t attend church because we are on holiday for a change, or go swimming as we normally do, and progressed up the River Yare on to Norwich ….

The otherness of “holiday for a change” is clear. “Differentiation” was
also achieved by visiting churches (Norwich Cathedral, Ranworth Church, St Benet’s Abbey) from time to time, perhaps as a temporary “respite” from pub life, expressing a recurring need to return to “normality”. The word “nature” was not mentioned at all in this group’s expectations or in the interview: but, nevertheless, the concept was clearly present, serving as a source of otherness and spectacle. As in Case One the favorite signifier was “wildlife” in the form of waterfowl:

Respondent: Right outside the pub, there’s a Coot on the nest …. I was actually feeding it out of my hand. A wild Coot. It was incredible, wasn’t it?

Such tameness in a wild creature authenticated the experience, but there was irritation that it had not been photographed:

Respondent: I don’t know. There was no flash in it was there? Couldn’t take a picture with yours [disposable camera] because there was no flash with it. It was evening when I found it [the coot].

It had to remain just a tale for the voyagers to relate, and presumably the “tame duck” shot (number 7, Figure 4) was taken in compensation. This shot had much the same form as the coot story: an ostensibly wild bird, so close that it could be included in the perceptual frame of the group. With the exception of the Vintage Broadsman, all of the subjects featured in “contrived” photographs were mentioned proudly in the interview, conveying the impression that they were well-known to the group and reinforcing their joint role as mythical form. The group also appropriated a lavender bush they found growing on the river bank:

Respondent: It was ever so lonesome, wasn’t it, the lavender bush, and we thought that would just be nice with the rest of the plants in our garden, didn’t we, it looked ever so lonesome by its poor old little self. So we decided to bring it with us it looked so lonesome.

This statement seemed to contain alibis for ostensible theft. “Lonesome”, rather than contemporary English “lonely” implied that the group did not take the alibi (or hence the theft) seriously. Mentioning the incident underlined the “wicked” intent discussed above. The bush itself appeared in number 13, where it was evidently intended as a “trophy” to authenticate this Broads holiday and differentiate it from others, past and future. Inclusion of the researcher in shot number 12 (despite her protests) was probably another manifestation of trophy-hunting. The group also had an “activity list”, which specified sightseeing goals and was evidently passed on from year to year:

Respondent: Monday night arrived at Potter Heigham hoping to see … the museum of the Broads they’ve got there. Disappointed because we found out it was closed, it opened on Wednesdays. Disappointing because we went there last year, and it was the day before it opened officially so we missed out. But there was compensation. We had another barbecue, got changed and went and had more beer. Another evening out.

As in Case One, the group was concerned to give the appearance of
maximizing “activity” and “consuming” as much experience as possible. It was possible to “miss out”, but also to compensate for this, in much the same way as one might buy one product as a surrogate for another in a supermarket. The presence of a pre-decided list was consistent with the large proportion of the photographs showing “the things one must see”. Further, “life in the slow lane” was perceived in terms of “historical” otherness, away from modern, everyday life:

Interviewer: So how do you find life in the slow lane? What is it about it that’s slow?

Respondent: Just the pace of life. You can’t go faster than the boat for a start. Because years ago the Wherries went slow. The reed lighter boat hand-poled along, only slow. All life over the centuries has been slow on the rivers. It’s still slow. We get everything done and there’s no rush. Get back to the big city and you’re back to normal.

The historic boats, like “the slow lane” were forms for a myth of “unhurriedness”, as an antidote to modern life. The generalization of the form was apparent from the juxtaposition of reed lighters, wherries and modern cruisers, which made it clear that “slow” was entirely relative. The reed lighters were intended to lend to the relatively fast modern craft extra slowness and to contrast more strongly with modern road travel, just as “slow lane” contrasted unexpectedly with the “fast lane” of the modern cliché. Outdated types of boat also lent a connotation of an “idealized past”, which the group counterpointed against their everyday life. As might be expected, this group was much more businesslike than the other when it came to comments about the boat:

Interviewer: What about the boat, that you’ve been on this year?

Respondent: It’s adequate, but we are changing next year.

Respondent’s mother: Just the children are growing up and we need a bit more.

Respondent: We’re after a boat, as identical to this, its just a little bit longer so there’s a little bit more room, sleeping room for us, that’s all. As regards the type of boat, we like the layout because there’s no canopy to move to go under bridges, so we don’t get rained on.

As in Case One the boat was not a mythical signifier for the holiday, but its prosaic nature supplied the form for myth, the concept being the group’s space. Thus the boat’s function was that of a refuge from the otherness of the Broads, and a vehicle for differentiation. This explained the noteworthiness of the duck in number 7 (Figure 4) as wild nature crossing the boundary signified by the outline of the boat into the real world of the spectator/visitor.

At the end of the holiday there was a leave-taking process which acknowledged that each year’s experience was a unique event. Memories accrued during the holiday gave the group a partial, temporary ownership of the otherness of the Broads, but next year would bring a different otherness to be mastered:

Respondent: Going away from somewhere when you’ve had a pleasant time always seems longer than going. Because you leave something
behind. Even if it’s only memories you’re leaving something behind. Memories. They’re different from last year’s and the year before that and the year before that, and you never know what next year will hold.

So that’s the nice thing to look forward to for next year.

The form “something left behind” signified the culmination, but also the specificity of this particular adventure, which was stressed throughout the interview. It was at once intensely personal and illogical (since one “takes” memories with one, rather than leaving them behind). The motivation seemed to be to claim the time spent on this year’s Broads holiday as the group’s own, but also to differentiate it from the previous year and to prepare the ground ready for the following year. A new “adventure” would of course entail leaving behind the memories of the previous year.

In both of these two cases, respondents used myths to express their experience. However, comparatively few of these seemed to come complete from popular culture as both form and concept; and some of those which were “the easy life” and “good fun for adults and kids” came across as trite and insincere. “Freedom” and “nature” were examples of popular concepts that the groups had internalized. Evidence for this could be seen in the myths’ inter-relatedness and in the way respondents sought further forms to enrich and “confirm” the concepts. Thus, nature became a form for freedom along with a perceived lack of rules, restrictions and modern conveniences. Nature itself was signified entirely through wildlife, its most potent form being a wild water bird. Yet excitement and adventure were signified by nature being all around and by its encroaching on the boat, a symbol of the everyday personal space of the holidaymakers. The motivation behind all these popular myths was a need to find in the holiday experience echoes of the respondents’ assumptions about the world. The difference between insincere myths and internalized ones seemed to be the strength of the respondents’ belief, upon which motivation depended.

Both groups also expressed their experience in personal forms and concepts, which most notably included “sailor and scientist” (discovery) “pubs and beer” (an alternative, slightly “wicked” social context). These concepts were linked to other myths. For instance, the “scientist” role set the Case One respondent apart from the rest of his group, excusing him from driving the boat with its attendant risks and at the same time justifying his desire to be alone and free. “Pubs and beer” necessitated regular halts, reinforcing the timelessness of the holiday. It introduced the group to new people, and the “wickedness” justified exploits such as the lavender bush, which at the same time fulfilled the need to take trophies. The myths of both Cases could be related to known tourism phenomena, since they both expressed forms of otherness, and playfulness (Cohen 1985). In fact myth was the perfect vehicle to experience and express play, since it allowed the respondents to resonate between asserting and retracting their ideas. Playful language was also in evidence: “it looked so lonesome”, “Wroxham Bridge was a bit hairy”. Both groups’ myths also acknowledged postmodern consumer values of “activity” and “more”.

MYTHOLOGY OF BOATING TOURISM
The main difference between the two cases was the way in which they achieved their holiday needs. In Case One, initial expectations, photographic sequence and the interview all point to a goal (an otherness) of solitary freedom. In Case Two, the goal was to renew the group’s cohesion by transforming the everyday group into a “new” holiday group, achieved through the medium of “pubs and beer”. Yet no data set told the whole story. The respondent in the first case remained with his boat and group, his solitude only an unrealized yearning. In the other case, the new group had continually to reaffirm its identity with the old by touching base with its old reference point, the church. This “controlled” otherness was also apparent in the way the second group responded to the wild coot and the duck on the boat. Both cases produced a “frisson”, apparently of anxiety that nature was invading their everyday space. This was less obvious in Case One, but can be detected in the way the respondent used the power of mythical speech to play down nature: “It was quite nice looking at some of the natural things”.

The different cases may also be viewed in a moral light. Matless contrasts “good” Broads tourists, those concerned with nature, culture or sailing under canvas with “bad” ones, whom he epitomizes with the “Hullaballoos” of Arthur Ransome’s Coot Club with their loud music, slovenly dress and motor-boats (1994:130ff.). Both of the cases presented here were potentially “Hullabaloos”, since they drove motor boats and took very little interest in local nature or culture. Case One dealt with this moral problem through a mythology centered around nature and freedom defined as solitude. Case Two used the device of mythology to admit “hullaballooohood” whilst on the Broads, but keep it at arm’s length from their everyday lives. This can be seen in the absence of “pubs and beer” from their photographs and the memories, which were “left behind”.

CONCLUSION

The narratives presented in this paper show ample evidence of myth as defined by Barthes. They were full of derived forms and rich but ill-defined concepts, and the underlying motivation was generally clear. There were frequent cases of resonance between mythical concepts and their underlying linguistic signifiers, a characteristic that Barthes claims as typical of myth.

The myths used by respondents in this study derive from popular and commonsense sources, but were sometimes intensely personal in their interpretation. They included forms from postmodern society, such as “nature” “adventure” and “good fun for adults and kids”, but also concepts such as “otherness” and “activity”. The power of the myths was clearly dependent on the level of the respondents’ belief in them, so that differences in mythical power expressed themselves in the strength of the motivation and hence of the number of supporting forms that respondents used to bolster up their myths. Individuals would sometimes start with a whole myth (both form and concept) and express the strength of their belief by finding new forms. At other
times, they would use their assumptions (concepts) to interpret forms around them. The process of supporting a myth meant accruing new forms to signify it, glossing over its inconsistencies, and ignoring or rationalizing away any signifiers that conflicted with the motivation. This meant using myth, as a form of deceit (Barthes 1973:29) or as a “vehicle of forgetfulness” Selwyn (1996:3). Myth was also used to evade or obscure moral issues such as the propriety of Broads touristic motivation and behavior.

Therefore, there seemed to be considerable scope for individuals to use their own forms and concepts (although the latter was less frequent). However, even when individuals used their own myths, their motivation could be traced back to deeper mythical concepts derived from postmodern society, which included consumer values such as “getting full value” and “doing what you are supposed to” on holiday; individuality, such as being “wicked” achieving “solitude” or “doing one’s thing”; and action, rather than just “being”. As well as identifying these elements of holiday experience, the mythological analysis of the holiday discourse also made it possible to integrate photographs, written, and spoken text in a coherent way. In doing so it built on, or confirmed various findings of other researchers in the semiological tradition. For example, it was possible to see how holidaymakers resolved issues of otherness (Brown 1996:36) and strangerhood (Dann 1996a:12) using “differentiation” (Cohen 1972:164) and other strategies.

The idea that myths are maintained by accruing new signifiers for existing concepts offers considerable potential for understanding touristic attitudes to the sustainability and development of destinations. Strongly motivated tourists seem to eagerly identify forms to support their mythical expectations, suppressing those that do not. However this situation must have its own limits, beyond which the elasticity of the myth must collapse. In the Broads examples, nature—a concept central to the web of mythology that defines the tourist experience—is nowadays signified by a duck or a coot. In the mid-20th century, the most important mythical form was the bittern, now virtually gone. Likewise, the brown, eutrophied water that is now accepted by all tourists was crystal clear in the mid 20th century. Nobody can claim that this environment has been sustained, yet the tourist numbers have grown. Mythology seems to be the device by which they rationalize their enjoyment of the Broads, but the myths are continually being stretched. Lévi-Strauss claims that myth in primitive cultures performs an analogous role to that of modern science in the developed world. However he notes that “unlike science ... myth is unsuccessful in giving man more material power over the environment” (1978:17). The present study implies a much richer interplay between myth and the material world, in which ideas influence the behavior of both tourists and those who cater for them. Ultimately myths have the power to destroy or sustain delicate touristic environments such as the Norfolk Broads.
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