



The Role of the Odyssey in Consumer Behavior and in C Research

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THE ROLE OF THE ODYSSEY IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND IN CONSUMER RESEA

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In Homer's Odyssey, Odysseus (or Ulysses to the Romans) experienced 10 years of obstacles, challenge, and adv Ithica following the Trojan war. The journey involved extraordinary experiences with giants, Hades, Sirens, gods, peoples--the stuff of folktales and all quite outside of everyday Greek experience. While the goals of the Consum the summer of 1986 were less ambitious, there was a similar hope of experiencing consumer behavior in forms, differed from those of our day-to-day lives. It seems particularly appropriate that the participants chose an epic which such experience was sought. For the journey has traditionally been, both in experience and in metaphor, is acquired. This paper will explore the characteristics of the journey that make it a primary means of learning al other people. From this historical and metaphorical base, these characteristics will be examined in the Consume the journeys of those consumers we encountered who were conducting odysseys of their own.

THE JOURNEY AS A SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge can be of various types including mystical, personal, and scientific. The journey has long been associ mystical knowledge in such journeys as religious pilgrimages (Turner and Turner 1978), the Crusades, and the jo prophets. It has been suggested that this same seeking of mystical knowledge is also present in modern pilgrimag

World (Moore 1980, King 1981). The search for self knowledge via a journey also has a long history, and has had American works as *On the Road* (Kerouac 1957), *Travels with Charlie* (Steinbeck 1962), *Zen and the art of Motorcycling* (Pirsig 1974), and *Blue Highways at Moon* (1982). And the journey as a search for scientific knowledge is illustrated by Darwin (Darwin 1860/1962), Niebuhr's expedition to the Middle East (Defert 1982), and the Apollo Moon missions. The search for knowledge is not a mutually exclusive pursuit. For instance, one may learn about self and the world simultaneously through a journey undertaken by Eighteenth Century European Aristocrats (Plumb 1968). But all such knowledge-seeking implies ties between the journey and knowledge that predates any metaphorical association.

As Jager (1975) demonstrates, there is also an ancient Greek tradition of the journey as a way to scholarly knowledge. The Greek word *theoroi*, from which our word *theory* derives, could mean both a religious journey and a voyage of enquiry (Jager 1975, p. 238). Observation and seeing were taken as the starting point for knowledge. The ancient Greek thinker was not confined to the everyday working world and allowed to undertake a journey to strange places in order to return home with new knowledge that could be passed on to others. There are several key elements in such a quest:

1. The journey is set apart from the ordinary and is outside of daily life; it is in this sense is sacred. The theorist travels to a new place and seeks that which is emergent, unpredictable, enchanting and awe inspiring (Jager 1975, p. 239).
2. The journey is austere. Comforts are left behind in order to travel lightly and unencumbered, but also in order to return to a familiar and comfortable existence in which questioning is unnecessary and meanings are never probed beyond the surface. The traveler/thinker becomes different from others.
3. The ancient ideal for the journey is self-sufficiency. This requires being resourceful, confident, and persevering. A sufficient traveler/thinker gains freedom from both dependency and stagnation.
4. "The traveler shows affection for his reliable companions, his horse or his car, his compass and his weapon--. The travelers are directed outward towards the task at hand, not inward or toward each other" (Jager 1975, p. 250). Tools and comforts must be seen as means rather than ends.
5. The traveler/thinker leaves the cyclical time of the dwelling (with its repetitive seasons, encounters, and tasks) for the time of the journey (with its narrow path, singular occurrences, unique and unrepeatable events, and strange people that will never be seen again).
6. At the same time, the journey begins and ends with the community. Departure is necessary to learn, and return is necessary to teach. At this stage of the journey [the return] the theorist places himself between the fullness of the events and the community's eager audience (Jager 1975, p. 259).

Participants in this summer's Odyssey can attest to the presence of all of these elements of the journey. We were in turning away from our familiar summer routines in favor of an ignoble motor home and the strange and wonderful world of the road. We talked to street people, egg farmers, and those touring mansions of nineteenth century robber barons. We stayed in a homeless shelter, a hospital, and numerous RV parks. We visited a gambling mecca, a small middle American town celebrating its centennial, and an Eastern town devastated by a flood. We toured an elephant museum, a chocolate museum, and a farm on the Great Plains. The closest we came to familiar scenes were a day in an Hispanic supermarket and a day in a fast-food franchise.

The austerity of the journey was evident in our tendencies to skip meals, attempt 20-hour working days, absent our friends, abstain from sex for long periods, and purchase only food stuffs and research materials from the vast array of vendors encountered. It was not that we are by nature ascetic or that we didn't miss these comforts, but rather that the journey was so demanding. At the same time, our desire to be self-sufficient was manifest in traveling with an RV that was office, bedroom, and transportation all in one. It was also used as a place to autodrill informants, type field notes, and edit manuscripts.

This reliance on our tools and each other did produce strong feelings of affection and attachment. Antithetical to the journey it became an essential friend which was personalized with various artifacts from the trip. When invited to stay in a hotel, we usually opted for the RV. A week's stay in a Hilton hotel was a great annoyance. The occasional RV dinners we finished with a sense of relief.

source of quiet pride. Our computers and microcassette tape recorders were constant and trusted companions without.

And certainly we grew closer to each other, despite inevitable conflicts that occasionally occurred regarding scarce computers, time, bathing water, and cameras. In all of this our external focus on the research tasks at hand was

The linear time and path of our journey was guided by an overall time commitment (June 13 to August 25) and from Los Angeles) and arrival (Boston). While we stayed as much as two weeks in a few destinations, we seldom spent more than a few days at a research site; one was the norm. And, although some of us plan follow-up research with our informants, we are not likely to come this way again in our research travels. There was such variety that we could never find ourselves bored or bored where we could fully anticipate what would come next. But we were broadly cyclical in returning to the home base where our primary joint planning took place last year. and we are presenting these initial reports to an audience that is both exciting and invigorating.

In all these respects, we can identify with the Greek ideal of the journey as a learning experience. We share the Western ideal of believing, but recognize that knowledge requires further abstraction. Such abstraction and analysis began during the fieldwork, continuing in the effort to develop grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). That which we present here is not the actual experience. But higher level abstraction, theorizing, analysis, testing, and reporting remain to be finished. We seek closure on so large a project.

THE JOURNEY AS A METAPHOR FOR KNOWLEDGE GENERATION

It is so common to think of the journey and its components and outcomes as a way to knowledge, that our learners commonly invoke this theme. At one level, the journey (both generically and specifically), can be seen as a search for knowledge. A coincidence that the modal participant in the *Odyssey* was a 40-year-old male. This is thought to be the age period of crisis (Sheehy 1976, Levinson 1978), and striking out in a new direction is thought to be a common self-seeking event for students. We speak of pathways, passages, getting off to a running start, solo flight, shifting gears, toboggan sliding, becoming a leader, seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, the life course, barriers, road maps, transients, runaway wives, exploratory travel, and self. A major goal according to such treatments is to learn about and accept oneself; to acquire knowledge and to use it.

Religious travel metaphors regarding the attainment of enlightenment are also common. We may be said to seek enlightenment, salvation, follow the path of enlightenment, walk in the paths of righteousness, walk through the valley of death, walk on the straight and narrow, stumble, lose our way, take one step at a time, backslide, climb the stairway to heaven, and wander aimlessly.

Jager (1975) has pointed out that there are also many journey-based metaphors used in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. We speak of progress, advances, reaching conclusions, keeping up or falling behind, making breakthroughs, moving forward, reaching a plateau, scaling new heights, penetrating the unknown, research streams, discoveries, stumbling onto new ideas, running experiments, running down leads, dead ends, and the leading edge or avant garde of research.

The pervasive use of metaphors involving the journey as a source of knowledge, from ancient religious texts to contemporary reports, suggests that the journey is a compelling and useful metaphor. To be so pervasive it is likely that there is something about this utility probably begins in the fruitfulness of actual physical journeys as a means of acquiring what we are seeking knowledge. A number of primal societies use some form of travel (usually solo) as a rite of passage that provides an opportunity for encountering new people and places, overcoming obstacles, learning what one can do when challenged, and simply surviving. Beyond, there is indeed a chance to gain wisdom in such travel rites. The contemporary adolescent's love of driving is seen as a similar self-imposed rite of passage in the quest for knowledge about self and knowledge about the world. The use of such journeys supports the view that the metaphor of the journey is an appropriate one.

Yet, the metaphor of the journey as a means of enlightenment is a Western one, even if not entirely so. Drawing away from and withdrawal from the outside world in order to gain knowledge are more common in Eastern religious traditions. The journey in such quests for knowledge is the removal of oneself from everyday experience and what is familiar. In the East, meditation and contemplation as an "inner journey". Whether this characterization is borrowing an inappropriate

unimportant. What is more important is that we are unlikely to make breakthrough discoveries in the intellectual home. A change of environment is an essential ingredient to precipitate new forms of knowledge, and surely to do this should be the basis for any attempt to develop knowledge about it. These were the goals of the Consumer Behavior goals of a number of the informant consumers whom we encountered and who are considered next.

CONSUMER ODYSSEYS

Non-Odysseys and Mini-odysseys

The counterpart to the journey is home. In order to appreciate epic consumer journeys we also sought to appreciate encounters with consumers in their homes, and in eight cases we attempted a detailed photographic record within these homes. In two of these cases we also autodrived the informants using photographs or video-recording to interpret (Heisley and Levy 1985). We visited the dwellings of the rich, the poor, and numerous strata in between. Statements of home as a limiter of knowledge was provided by some relatively home-bound Amish who were on horse and wagon. We learned that they were curious about the outside world even though education was stopped to prevent excessive worldly knowledge. Without electricity and with limited reading material, mass media images also severely constrained. Instead of relying on such traditional means of gaining at least a general knowledge of the world, we sought to experience it through the tourists and "outsiders" who visited their communities and shopped in their stores. One who worked at a large flea market ticked off the places from which he had met visitors, as a traveler might tick off a list. One might speculate that such acquisition of knowledge aids the understanding of what it means to be Amish and the reconciliation of the great differences in consumption and lifestyles between Amish and non-Amish. Lifestyle contrasts were evident as in the juxtapositioning of Amish buggies and flea-market RVs in one of the Amish communities we visited. To appear to contradict Amish values as much, we opted to use bicycles in that particular Amish community.

But as others have suggested, home has no meaning without the risk-taking journey outside the home (Tuan 1977). Autodriving reportedly entails getting someone else to drive them on a vacation or even keeping (off their home property) and driving them in.

The recreational vehicle represents a combination or compromise between home and journey. It has been observed to contain elements of two strong American ideals: freedom and home (Lifton 1970, Neuman 1973, Pierson 1973). Although it isn't sufficient binding commitment to property when a vehicle is one's sole home (Cooper 1972, Appleyard 1979), a mobile home is used only for journeys away from another home it is accepted and admired in working class America.

Based on a summer's worth of random encounters with both motor home and non-motorized mobile home owners, we appear to see differences in the use and "hominess" of these two types of mobile homes. Typically the non-motorized are placed in a fixed location RV park for the summer. In some cases the working member of the household (almost always a woman) works while the family stayed and vacationed/summered in the trailer. The three such temporary trailer communities we visited intensively had strong patterns of neighborhood interaction, shared in the joint activities within the RV park community, and externally personalize and beautify their "home". These trailers were clearly thought of as home, and in one park we saw costly improvements made by the trailer owners on the properties that they only rented. Clearly there was a strong sense of home to these not too mobile mobile homes.

On the other hand, the motorized mobile home travelers we encountered were much less openly sociable. They often parked their RVs at night to watch television in isolation from neighbors. Less personalization of these mobile homes occurred. They didn't stay in one place long enough to become friends with "neighbors". They were also those for whom travel to new destinations appeared to have more appeal than relaxing in one spot until it felt like home. A somewhat greater sense of community developed when such travelers stayed in one spot for some time or, as in the case of some swap meet sellers who repeatedly encountered one another. It was more common however that a family, or more often a retired couple, traveled to travel on a vacation with only short stays at each site. Their motor homes were more likely to sport decals of a name given to their mobile home or designating their family, as was common among owners of immobile vacation homes. Winnebago is nomadic and they travel as individual family units. But for the most part their travel is of sufficient length to qualify as a "mini-odyssey".

Some Consumer Odysseys

The exceptions in which mobile home travelers were on a full fledged odyssey were notable. As with our Odyssey same characteristics typifying the knowledge-seeking journey. Their odysseys also suggest several other hypotheses in the analysis of the data. Three such traveling groups, employing quite different types of mobile homes will be used as examples encountered along a "blue highway" roadside in the West will be referred to as the Burtons (a pseudonym). They owned a suburban home, a pickup truck, and the possessions that a reported \$100,000/year salary provided. Location and their former life provided a striking contrast to their present lifestyle. They sold everything and are going to Alaska by draught horses. Their 15-year-old son is being taught by his mother (in her 30s; her husband was in his 40s) and they have their food, clothing, and support with anyone who needs it. They were following a leisurely pace and had traveled for the nine months since they left their former home. Part of their time was taken in constructing new wagons, including a "baby" - a draught colt born en route.

The Burtons were seeking something. Part of their "mission" was religious and a test of their faith in God. Part was a search for self-sufficiency and an attempt to demonstrate to themselves that the world was good. Part was a shifting of energies for a better life. And part was simply openness to whatever the next day would bring them. They had hosted all kinds of people from Angels motorcyclists to families traveling in RVs. Besides openness and search, the Burtons suggested a variant of the "do with less." As they shod their horses, built new wagons, and adapted to life on the road, rather than making space to accumulate they discarded and made do with fewer. What seemed to be occurring is that as they developed more confidence in their ability to do and provide what was needed, they needed fewer material things as a security blanket. They did document their journey and several accumulated newspaper stories about them however, and shared their album with us. The other souvenirs were restricted to found objects like cow skulls that were consistent with the pioneer image of their covered wagon appearances. Thus they sought to tangibly memorialize their experiences, but in a way that was consistent with the universal aspect of tourism and appears even more essential in an epic journey (Tuan 1970, 1975; Whetmore and Whetmore 1977). They appeared to relish their new life, although the son still missed the bicycle that he had saved his money for and they left. The one element that is missing from the odyssey pattern in the Burtons' adventure is a community to return to who are left behind that they may return to, but the teaching that they do is more directed to those who stop to

A second consumer odyssey was encountered in the summer-long coast-to-coast bicycle trip of a 20s-aged male (pseudonym). This was the second summer he had spent doing this, and this time he was accompanied by a female student, but takes a leave of absence from work in order to test himself against the road, against other bicyclists, against the elements, and against himself. He too sought to tangibilize his trip with photographs, collector plates for his motorcycle, and to others at home or, occasionally, to himself. Like the Burtons, these trips have taught him that he can do great things that he formerly thought. Even though he travels heavily for a bicyclist (55+ pounds of gear and bike), when he began his odyssey he began throwing almost all the possessions out of his room. -His mother stopped him when he tried to sleep on a sleeping bag and the floor. He also feels that he has learned how to get more in touch with his body on his trips. And with self-sufficiency, his trips result in affection for gear (although as with an old horse, he is willing to retire it when worn out) and the adoption of a different type of time. Such familiar routines as getting up, eating, and retiring are done at regular times, but depend upon the challenges and sights of the day. As with other types of vacations, there is a compression of both time and space on such a trip (Grinstein 1955). And there is clearly a learning intent while on his bicycle odyssey and on his return. He takes numerous slides with the express purpose of showing them to school and church groups to convince these audiences that they too can follow their dreams and do great things. There is in fact a sort of mission to show others the wonders of America by bike. He not only feels that he learns more about himself on these trips, but also about geography and geology.

A third example of a consumer odyssey encountered this summer is the coast-to-coast and back (plus Canada) trip of a market vendor who will be called Guisseppi. Two years ago he sold his restaurant, quit cooking, and started a full-time merchandise business with a partner and his partner's wife. This summer he bought a 1940s vintage armored truck and converted it to a mobile home. He is using it to travel with his son (16) and his partner's son (18) on a circuit of flea markets. They live in the cramped van, but their stock will be replenished by mail from the partners who will send more of the merchandise and miscellaneous other used merchandise in which they specialize. On this trip, he plans to do it all, including visiting the places of the van they live in and travel in and he basks in the attention that it draws from those that see it. It has a few

mounted on the outside and says "Guisseppe's Mercantile Establishment" in house paint on the side. There are a outside so that he can do some "barking" to attract attention to his stall at the swap meet. Like the Burton's, Gui markedly different than in his former life. His hair is moderately long, his clothing is very casual and somewhat tanned. He also seems a picture of self confidence. His eyes truly seem to sparkle and there is clearly an affection clowns. His toy is that his partners' son is going into the business and is learning from him. His sadness is that his college and have nothing to do with the business. Still he is glad that he can see the country with his son and intr relatives. It is also clear that Guisseppi sees this as a once-in-a-lifetime trip and relishes it dearly. But like the bicy return "home". It will be good to return to hot showers and the other comforts of home, but he would not give

CONCLUSION

To have encountered these and other odysseys this summer while on our own Odyssey is more than a matter of seems to be a compelling desire for such a journey in a large segment of the population and many make at least own. When we described our odyssey to others its purposes were not always accurately understood, but the ess envy and the frequent wishful desire to go along. Nevertheless, the odyssey is one variety of travel experience th the literature on tourism (e.g., it is missing from typologies in Graburn 1977, Nunez 1977, and Smith 1977). The d odyssey and the ordinary vacation or tour is perhaps one of degree rather than kind. But when the commitment sell possessions, and set out into the unknown, the magnitude of difference is significant. The commitment to kn much greater and may avoid the sort of misinformation typically associated with rapid tourism (Dunbar 1977). A pretend to the sort of Durkheimian sacredness typically associated with home, the odysseys are imbued with the is associated with sacred status (MacCannell 1976, Graburn 1977).

There is much work remaining to be done on the data from our summer Odyssey. More than 500 single-spaced and logs are now being evaluated with the aid of a computerized qualitative data analysis program. Over 100 vid audio tape recordings, and thousands of photographs must be analyzed. Separate analyses will be completed fo research sites, and abstract themes. Some follow-up and member-checking with informants will be done (Linco Huberman 1984). And further triangulation, auditing, and cross-site comparison will be accomplished. Until ana cannot fully answer what the Odyssey meant and what we learned. Perhaps we will have to answer this question when asked about his mystical odyssey narrative, Journal of Albion Moonlight, that -It means a thousand and a t [Your] last summer mean?" Perhaps our Odyssey enlightened informants about the meaning of their own odys us something about our own journey in search of knowledge. If we have committed some heresy in the process we are delighted. And as for the affection toward traveling companions.. this shall endure.

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AMERICAS, a sense of peace wither the rock-n-roll of the 50's, this day fell on the twenty-sixth day of the month Carney that the Athenians called metagitnionom.