

Exploring *Human* Experience



Edward Soanes

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## ABSTRACT

This essay argues that since human experience consists inseparably of mind, body and the material world, and that if we are to better understand the lives of people in the past we need to recognize that we cannot separate material culture, social process and life-tasks from the experiences of the people who carried them out. Personal experience of a thing can never produce an understanding of that thing that another might have without first discussing who this 'other' is and what their motivations are for being there. The constitution of experience, as an inseparable mix of mind, body and the world prevents the identification, in the present, of 'prehistoric' experiences in the present. An understanding of the theory of human experience can, however, demonstrate that change and the appropriation or alteration of activities and beliefs for new ends can easily be motivated by the power that certain experiences have on us. Thus understanding human experience helps us make new interpretations of the past.

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## INTRODUCTION

This essay argues that since human experience consists inseparably of mind, body and the material world, and that if we are to better understand the lives of people in the past we need to recognize that we cannot separate material culture, social process and life-tasks from the experiences of the people who carried them out. This means that when, for example, we talk about the procured resources, the buried dead or the end of the use-life of a house we must remember that it was people who *did* these things. We should also therefore discuss the *experience* of such acts.

The purpose of Tringham's fictional account (right) of the burning of a Vinca culture Neolithic long house is to demonstrate that so much of what gives people 'faces' is lost in archaeology. It is within the theory of human experience that we find an explanation for this lack of 'faces' in the past, and possible ways forward, through which we might better understand the changing lives of prehistoric people. The purpose of this essay, then, is to use an understanding of our experiential relationship with the world in the following two case studies.

*'She watched the house burn. He had died. He's strung up in the tree now, safe. Now it's time to kill the house. Finally after all these years living in these godforsaken marshlands. Stuck in this place, with no one to turn to or help, except him, or worse, her ... Mustn't let the fire die, or he'll come back. More wood. Pile it up a bit more here. Let in some more air! A house must breathe to die. Push the air into the cavity. That's better. Flaming again! Burn his pots! Kill his stuff! Now I'm in charge. The circle is complete. I can go back to the village. Away from the heat, away from the creatures that torture and bite. Back to village noise, complaints, shrieks, laughter, gossip, friends, life.'* (Tringham, 1991:124)

The theory of human experience is vast and this essay will focus on only a small selection of critical elements; those of memory, identity, familiarity and the constitution of material things. The first section is about the philosophy of experience, with the main focus on being on examples from the two most popular philosophers within archaeology; Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. These examples will form the foundation upon the following two case studies. Each case study will consist of contemporary examples of human experience with a following discussion of what they teach us about the nature of experience in the present and the past.

*Case 1. The Frozen Waves of Järrestad.* This case study is about the possibility of using our own direct experiences in the present of prehistoric monuments as a way of understanding their purpose in the past. It demonstrates that the constitution of human experience prevents any 'short cuts' to understanding a past, which after all, no longer exists and cannot be experienced.

*Case 2. Abandoned Places.* Here, the possibility of using an understanding of experiences in a specific 'experience-scape', that of abandoned places, can give us new insight into the reasons for the spread of ideas in Neolithic Europe. By accepting the constitution of experience in interpretations of the past we can use the archaeological record to talk not just about material or social concerns but also about experiential concerns. The power of lived experiences can be the root cause of social change.

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# THE WORLD OF EXPERIENCE

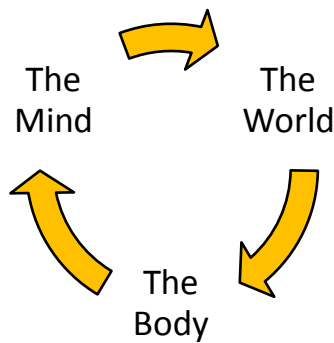


Fig. 1. Mind, Body and World are interconnected.

The ‘world’ of experience does not refer to the common idea of the purely material world upon which we stand. It refers to a more fundamental world that is defined by human experience, actions and social context (Thomas 2004:187ff) and is a world that cannot exist without us in it. The basic underlying argument is that we only know of the world around us because of the simple fact that we see, hear, smell, touch and taste it. In short, we experience it. Nothing comes to us through any other means. Therefore our experience of the world is the *foundation* upon which every other understanding of it is built. We cannot know anything about the world without first making sense of our experiences of it.

The direct study of experience became its own distinct branch of philosophy at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1936) (Mooney & Moran, 2000). Husserl was concerned with the fact that although we understood that we could perceive the countless objects that surround us in the world we failed to understand how these objects actually came to be in our minds. Somehow a representation of these objects appears in our mind where we can then think about them. To Husserl, the then current conception of a person as being divided into two fundamental parts - a mind and a body – could not explain how physical objects became mental objects. The aim, then, of his philosophy was to study exactly that point where the physical and the mental meet, that is, our experience of the world.

The ideas of Husserl were quickly absorbed by other, well known philosophers who expanded upon the idea of exploring human experience. Within phenomenology, the two most well recognized philosophers to tackle this issue are Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) - a German philosopher who focused on what it is to be a human being – and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), a French philosopher who concentrated on the act of perception. Their ideas follow very different paths but in some respects they share a great deal.

1. Both philosophers put experience first. They both argue that our experience of the world forms the foundation upon which all other understandings of it are built. We live, first and foremost, in a world of human experience and that if we want to understand the reality of the physical world we must interpret our experiences of it.
2. This leads on to the idea that the mind and body separation is a false one. No experience can be reduced to nothing more than a physical perception and at the same time cannot be reduced to simply a mental process. All experience is a combination of both.

The verb ‘to experience’ is no easy word to define but as a bare minimum, experience is more than simply perception. To experience something - whether this ‘something’ is an object, a place or a situation - is to be affected by it, emotionally, physically and intellectually. As a simplification, then, experience is a fusion of three main elements of mind, body and the physical world. None can be excluded from experience.

## THE FAMILIAR WORLD

Living within the world in an everyday sense is done without much consideration of its nature or material presence at all. A central point in Martin Heidegger's philosophy (Blattner, 2006:49-59) is that during everyday life objects usually don't figure in our consciousness at all but are intrinsically a part of our world and available 'read-at-hand' to be used. So in order to live our everyday lives we do not need to think about the objects we use when pursuing our goals. We do not think of the computer when typing our essays, we think about what we want to write. We do not consider the hammer we use to build a set of shelves, we think about what we need to do to complete the task. What this shows is that our understanding of the world is first and foremost a pre-reflective one, or, as Heidegger puts it, we are 'familiar' with the world we live in. The craftsman of Blattner's example (above) does not spend any time considering the tools or materials at hand. As Blattner concludes:

*'When I renovated my house...and had the pleasure of observing a master craftsman at work, I noticed that he could joke around and offer personal and political wisdom, while all the while making a perfectly straight cut, often not looking the whole time at what he was doing.'* (Blattner, 2006:57)

*'Our primordial or originary being-in-the-world is a matter of familiarity, and when it comes to making our way about the world, familiarity is a function of competence or mastery.'* (Blattner, 2006:57)

Heidegger argues that, for us as human beings, the world should not be thought of as a world of *objects* – as we commonly think of it – but rather as a world of situations and goals. The world is a process of *living* as much as it is a material thing. The influential work of Pierre Bourdieu (1980), often cited within archaeology, is a theory of practice and explores the actions that take place within this 'familiarity' with the world. Important as part of this work is that although a person's actions are most often unreflective in nature (remember the example that we think about the essay we write, not the keys on the keyboard), they are still structured according to culturally specific rules, which are described by Bourdieu as the *habitus* (1980:52ff). Important in the concept of the habitus is that these rules are not fixed, and neither do they determine the outcome of a person's actions; a person uses them as a frame of reference that conditions the outcome. These actions need not be conscious ones and can be embedded in this sense of familiarity with the world. Giddens (1984) refers to the ability to act unreflectively in the world as 'practical consciousness' (Giddens, 1984:41-45).

## THE WORLD OF MEMORY AND IDENTITY

It is memory that allows us to experience, indeed, without memory we would not be aware of anything at all, being constantly trapped in the present and unable to draw on past experience. The present, including the things of the physical world that we perceive are, in part, created from the memory of past experiences. Further, we can argue that what we perceive cannot be pinpointed to a particular moment in time since it is constituted in part from past memories, that is (to state the obvious) experiences that happened in the past. As such memory should not be seen as simply a device to recall past events into consciousness, but actively contributes to our experiences in the present, even in our unreflective, routine, familiar actions in everyday life (Giddens, 1984, p.45-49).

*'... we should be aware of the difference between true memory, which has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body's inherent self knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories, and memory transformed by its passage through history, which is nearly the opposite: voluntary and deliberate, experienced as a duty, no longer spontaneous; psychological, individual, and subjective; but never social, collective, or all encompassing. How did we move from the first memory, which is immediate, to the second, which is indirect? (Nora, 1989:13)*

In Pierre Nora's (1989) essay on places and memory he talks of the distinction between *places* of memory (*lieux de memoire*) and *environments* of memory (*milieux de memoire*), where *lieux de memoire* represent places (such as monuments) constructed for the purpose of fixing a historical narrative in people's memories. *Milieux de memoire* represent places where actual memories are constructed and maintained; places with strong personal experiences attached to them. What is interesting here is that places (and objects) have such a powerful effect on the memory and on experience at all. *Lieux de memoire* work as anchors for a historical narrative and are used to appropriate people's memory of historical events, thus erasing or altering their own memory to fit the historical narrative.



Fig. 3. King Karl Gustav XI. A *lieux de memoire* in Malmö, Sweden.

It is precisely because physical objects and places have such a strong role in remembering that this appropriation is possible at all, and the root of this power lie in the previous argument: that our experiences of the world are both enabled and formed by our memories. To put it crassly, to alter someone's memories is to alter how they perceive the world, and to alter their identity. Our identity is intimately entangled with the places and things that surround us, and that we use in our activities. The self is not just in the mind, but in the world in which we dwell. Furthermore, it must hold that if our identities cannot be disentangled from the places and the objects that surround us, then what objects and places *are* cannot be disentangled from us and our identities.



## PERCEIVING THE PHYSICAL WORLD

In 1948 Maurice Merleau-Ponty presented a series of shows on French radio where he attempted to describe the ideas of his philosophy to a popular audience. The transcripts of the shows were later published (Merleau-Ponty 2004). In the third show, entitled 'Exploring the World of Perception: Sensory Objects' Merleau-Ponty discussed how we actually perceive objects that surround us and rejected the common, materialistic notion that an object is a sum of a number of material properties. Lemons, for example, cannot be seen as:

*'...a bulging, oval shape plus this fresh feel plus this acidic taste.'* (Merleau-Ponty 2004:59, original emphasis)

This is because it does not explain how it is that we see lemons as a 'unified entity'. Each property of the lemon is not separate data but that they are connected and affect each other and us, the subject. What he meant was that in experiencing objects we are intimately bound into a dialogue with objects, colours can affect us emotionally, smell can trigger memories, and so on. So even a simple lemon cannot be fully understood as a sum of its properties such as its *'...bulging, oval shape plus this fresh feel...'*

Merleau-Ponty took the idea further by discussing the properties of honey and the effect honey has on the body. The example he used referred to the hand that tries to grasp honey and how the physical – or bodily – relationship to the object is a part of its very definition. Here he meant that this quality of honey as being a viscous, sticky liquid is not something that exists on its own, it exists only in relation to the human body that tries to grasp it, and that properties of things are intimately bound up with the viewing subject. The example of honey and the hand that grasps it also serves, therefore, as a metaphor for the interrelationship between ourselves and the object world.

*'The things of the world are not simply neutral objects which stand before us for our contemplation. Each one of them symbolises or recalls a particular way of behaving, provoking in us reactions which are favourable or unfavourable.'* (Merleau-Ponty, 2004:63).



Fig. 2. A Lemon

The things that surround us are therefore not as simple as might be thought. The objects that we experience cannot be fully understood as a list of physical properties because within experience every object is always far more than these properties, indeed the properties themselves separated from the viewing subject. Objects in human experience are the result of a process of objectification involving the mind, body and the physical world.

*'Honey is a slow-moving liquid; while it undoubtedly has a certain consistency and allows itself to be grasped, it soon creeps slyly from the fingers and returns to where it started from. It comes apart as soon as it has been given a particular shape and, what is more, it reverses the roles by grasping the hands of whoever would take hold of it. The living, exploring hand that thought it could master this thing instead discovers that it is embroiled in a sticky external object. [...] So the quality of being honeyed ... can only be understood in the light of the dialogue between me as an embodied subject and the external object which bears this property.'* (Merleau-Ponty 2004:61)



## FROM THE FAMILIAR WORLD TO THE PHYSICAL. OBJECTIFICATION

We are capable of bringing the things that surround us into consciousness, of course, but this is an unusual situation for us (Blattner, 2006) which, counter-intuitively, makes the physical world actually more abstract *to us as human beings* than the familiar one. The physical world that we think we experience entirely unproblematically is in fact a construction, at least in part.

One of the triggers that makes us consciously aware of the material world is when an object needed to complete our goals ceases to work as expected. Suddenly the computer crashes while writing an essay, or the hammer breaks when hammering in the last nail of the shelves

(Blattner, 2006:49-52). It is often only then that the physical world truly comes to our attention in the manner described in the previous section ('Perceiving the Physical World' on p. 7).

If we consciously consider any object around us it is an act of interpretation and so material objects such as computers or a hammers are not fundamental 'units' in the physical world, but are 'revealed' during a process of perception or, as Thomas (2004:187ff) puts it, we 'unworld' them so that they become objects in our perception. Merleau-Ponty describes it as if objects 'rise up like sparks from a fire' from the background that is the familiar world (in which we normally live and operate). Perceiving physical things is an act of interpretation because, referring back to the section 'Perceiving the Physical World', since a computer, for example, is a creation of both the material object and the Mind. It is argued therefore that meaning does not reside *in* an object or purely in the subject's mind but that the object is inherently meaningful to us as part of our presence in the world. This is because since the moment of its creation (in perception) we imbue it with meaning; it is in part a creation of our minds just as much as it really exists in the material world.

It follows therefore that we cannot argue for a fundamental separation between the self and the world. The distinction between the physical world and the mind is blurred by arguing that this state of familiarity (see 'The Familiar World' on p. 5) must be constituted by both. A person's identity is therefore not simply 'in the mind' and cannot be separated from the world around us. Blattner puts it thus:

*'We are not just absorbed in the world, but our sense of identity, of who we are, cannot be disentangled from the world around us. We are what matters to us in our living; we are implicated in the world.'*  
(Blattner, 2006:12)

Our sense of identity is also 'embedded in how we *live*, rather than how we think or talk' (Blattner, 2006:39, original emphasis)



Fig. 4. A crashed computer.

## SUMMARIZING THEORY

Already there are many threads to the human experience of the world presented here and it is a representation that forces us to doubt some of the ideas that seem most concrete and reliable to us. As argued above, we do not spend all of our time in a world of objects at all but are usually far more concerned with the goals and thoughts that occur to us at any given time. This 'familiar world' is a world of unconscious action and interaction or, as Giddens (1984:41-45) puts it, a world of 'physical consciousness'. It is a place so familiar to us that we need not consciously consider it at all. When we do become consciously aware of objects in the world this is an act of objectification, and interpretation of our human experience.

In archaeology, narratives of the past are full of 'stuff' in the sense that the objects we attempt to describe 'objectively' are reduced to the status of a list of physical properties although attempts have been made to explore this issue (e.g.; Magnusson Staaf, 1996). It follows that the existence of past people that we try to create from such archaeological 'stuff' are also reduced. In archaeology, when we say that, for example, a pattern of post holes is a Neolithic long house, or that a recovered stone object is a flint axe, we have barely begun to capture what these things really are to the people that made them. We must be aware that what they are to us is not the same as what they were to the people that originally made and used them in the past. The difference between the artefact from 'then' to 'now' goes far beyond the N-transforms of Michael Schiffer (1996).

In the world of human experience we no longer talk about objects and places as simple, neutral things because as human beings, we also construct the things we experience out of our identities, which are themselves historically, socially and culturally situated (e.g.; Coudart, 2006:135). Identity and objects and the world we live in cannot be separated from each other.

The following case studies will try to explore the possibilities that a theory of experience raises for archaeology.

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# CASE 1. THE FROZEN WAVES OF JÄRRESTAD

The theoretical understanding of experience is only of use to archaeologists if it is implemented in practice, and phenomenological approaches set out to do just this. They aim to explore the direct experience of – most often - prehistoric monuments as an aid to understanding their original purpose. However, while phenomenological approaches are a common and accepted part of ethological studies (e.g.; Frykman & Gilje, 2003), within archaeology they are fraught with controversy (e.g.; Brück, 2005) because, plainly, archaeologists cannot experience the past in the same way that an ethnologist experiences the present: the past does not exist as a place to be visited. The key to a successful phenomenology of prehistoric monuments must therefore rely on the idea that some part of human experience in the present has something in common experiences in the past. Without this *common bond*, any experiential study would be no more informative than empirical observation. Phenomenological approaches within archaeology must argue their value despite these difficulties and this case study therefore aims to address the following question which, if answered, allows the phenomenological approach itself to be evaluated:

*Knowledge is experiential as much as it is intellectual, the material world around us is intrinsically meaningful at an experiential level, it does play a part in the construction of cultural meaning and cannot be reduced to either one or the other. Therefore, in theory, by visiting and experiencing a place such as an ancient monument, we can attempt to rediscover some of the experiential meaning of the place during the past (Tilley 2004:2ff).*

*Is there any common experiential bond between all people that can provide a basis for interpreting the past and how do people's individual identities affect their experiences in the present?*

In order to do this the phenomenological method, as described by Christopher Tilley (1994, 2004) will be employed in order to repeat a field study conducted by Tilley (2004:147-216) of the Bronze Age rock carvings at Järrestad in Scania, southern Sweden. The goal is not, however, to conduct a phenomenological exploration of the site in order to understand its role in the past, but to focus on the phenomenological process of exploring the monument in the present, looking for evidence of how interpretations of the past might be formed. We need to explore how 'subjective' phenomenological observations really are if we are to attribute them to the people of the past.

The method is therefore to start by making a diary containing details of what I can remember of the site from various sources and details of what I expect to find during the field study. The diary will also contain some of my expectations prior to the field work in order to later assess their influence. Next, Tilley's field study and interpretations of the Järrestad rock carvings will be read to provide a basis for my own pre-conceived ideas of the site and its possible interpretations. A visit to the site will be made in order to conduct my own phenomenological field study. It will be documented using field notes and photographs. Finally, the above 'data' will be used to assess how my experiences of the site at Järrestad were affected by my prior knowledge and pre-conceived ideas (from Tilley). The effectiveness of the phenomenological approach will then be discussed.

## THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

‘Archaeological phenomenology’ has most often been applied to the study of landscapes, monuments and architecture (although see Fuglestedt, 2005) and is particularly popular in the UK. As a method it has been spearheaded by Christopher Tilley (1994, 2004a, 2004b) who argues for phenomenological field studies where monuments should be directly experienced if they are to be properly understood. Rather than employing a phenomenological method as Tilley has done, other archaeologists such as Thomas (1999) and Bradley (1998) have used a theoretical understanding of the nature of experience in their work in order to relate concepts of experiencing space to Neolithic monuments. Both have used a large quantity of empirical evidence in combination with a recognition of the importance of understanding human experience (rather than an explicitly phenomenological method as argued by Tilley) to explain why such megalithic monuments were built and how they represented the shifting ideology of Mesolithic hunters.

*Phenomenology involves the attempt to describe the objects of consciousness in the manner in which they are presented to consciousness. It attempts to reveal the world as it is actually experienced directly by a subject as opposed to how we might theoretically assume it to be. The aim is not to explain the world (in terms, say, of physical causality or historical events or psychological dispositions) but to describe the world as precisely as possible in the manner in which human beings experience it. (Tilley, 2004:1)*

The fundamental aim of a phenomenological method is to *describe* the phenomena that present themselves to us in our experiences and nothing more. It is not intended to be used for abstract theorizing about how the world *should* be, or of what it *might* be constituted – in contrast to the majority of philosophical discourse. By stripping away our preconceived (reflective) ideas of what we are experiencing we can, it is argued, look again at what at first seems familiar and unproblematic and to reach a new understanding of such phenomena (Tilley, 2004a:1). In contrast to Tilley’s text (to the upper right) I have deliberately used the word ‘phenomena’ instead of ‘objects’. Phenomenology is not just about the study of physical objects; it can be used to describe all experienced phenomena such as emotions, events and so on. What this means is that we are to try to bring into consciousness those aspects of our existence in the world that are usually so familiar (‘The Familiar World’, p. 5) that we barely notice them. In the context of exploring archaeological sites such as the rock carvings at Järrestad this amounts, in practice, to an attempt not just to focus on the *objects* that surround us, but also to how they *affect* us. We need to become aware of how we behave and act in different environments, what draws our attention vs. what seems hidden, what paths do we naturally take when moving around, and even what impressions or feelings we might experience in such places. As a descriptive exercise we should not ‘filter’ what we experience according to assumptions of what might be important or not and, very importantly, any theoretical ideas we might have about places. Only after such work is done should we begin to interpret how and if such observations can be incorporated into an interpretation of the place (Tilley, 2004:1-31).

## CRITIQUE OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

The first criticism of phenomenology refers to the common experiential bond between people; that there is a level of experience, prior to the application of cultural meaning that is shared by all humans in all times (Tilley, 2004:31). Tilley continues to write that the phenomenological study of places and landscapes is about ‘...what places and landscapes *do* to the body, what effects they have, prior to the specificities of cultural meaning’, while Thomas (1999:35) writes that ‘...humans beings do not come upon a world of shapes and forms and add meaning: their world is inherently meaningful.’ In experiencing a place, how much of that experience is culturally specific and how much is a part of the ‘human universal’? Different aspects of the ‘human universal’ have been criticized by Brück (2005). These aspects focus on the common material bonds of the body and the world.

Many question the interpretations that have been made within archaeology. For example, Fleming (1999) criticizes Tilley’s (1994) interpretation of Welsh megalithic monuments since, he argues, the empirical data simply does not support this interpretation. The title of Fleming’s article is, tellingly *Phenomenology and the Megaliths of Wales: A Dreaming too far?* and he argues that the only way to interpret the archaeological record is through critical and logical debate of the evidence. Fleming’s criticisms ultimately focus on Tilley’s interpretations and not on the phenomenological method itself although he implies that it amounts to little more than a ‘dreaming’ on the part of the archaeologist.

A final criticism of this method by Coudart (2006:135) is that the past does not exist any more and cannot be directly experienced. What, then, is the value of such an exploration? The idea that we share ‘carnal bodies’ (Tilley, 2004b:201) with past people seems appears to neglect the fact that ‘a body is not only a physical, but also a social and cultural, construction set in a specific historical time’ (Coudart, 2006:135). So claiming that present day experiences have relevance in the past, at least if based on this claimed common bond, are irrelevant.

*‘I must confess that I see no connection, but rather a contradiction, between phenomenology (particularly Heidegger’s) and the study of the past – a past as an object to be explored in a time that no longer exists (even if the present and the future are always the heirs of the past).’ (Coudart, 2006:135)*

## RESEARCH DIARY

In order to assess the role of past experiences in the construction of those in the present, an important part of the study is to try to record as faithfully as possible the prior knowledge and pre-conceived ideas that I, as the experiencing subject, have of both the rock carvings of Järrestad and the outcome of the project. This will help me to assess the results after the field work is completed.

I am sitting in my kitchen writing the first draught of a research plan for the phenomenological investigation of Tilley's Phenomenological Method. I have visited the site of the Järrestad rock carvings once before in the company of some friends about 18 months ago, after skimming through Tilley's phenomenological study of the site in his book 'The Materiality of Stone'. I have, therefore, some knowledge of what to expect once I arrive. The following is a summary of what I remember (entirely from memory so it might be completely incorrect), both from books and from my previous trip.

- The carvings apparently date to the Bronze Age although I am vague on the exact dates.
- They cover an exposed surface of Cambrian sandstone, the surface of which is rippled, much like the sea, frozen in stone (this is Tilley's metaphor). The rippling effect is the result of the petrification of the old sandy seabed.
- The carvings are, according to Tilley, divided into zones. Each zone is demarcated by natural cracks in the rock surface and each zone represents some kind of unity.
- The carvings are placed so that in order to see them properly one needs to circle round the rock surface.
- It was very difficult to see some of the carvings due to erosion and the wearing effect of tourist feet. Some were never very deeply carved to begin with and I wonder whether they were originally painted in or not.
- The motifs include feet, boats, men with axes (and erect penises), acts of ploughing(?) and the famous 'dancing woman' although I can't remember if it is supposed to be interpreted as a man or a woman (or indeed if there are other interpretations).
- The footsteps have been interpreted by Richard Bradley as the footsteps of the dead heading down towards the sea (I think).
- The location in the landscape is at the western end of a shallow valley that points towards the sea to the east (the Baltic sea).

I have some pre-conceived expectations of the results of the journey and it will be interesting to try to assess their impact on the actual results.

- Tilley focuses a great deal on the relationship between body and the world and doesn't address the role of our own previous, contextual experiences in the construction of the present. I expect to find that my reading of Tilley's interpretation will strongly affect my own interpretation. I imagine that I will be constantly 'referring' to what Tilley writes about the place, and wonder whether I will be able to mentally 'put aside' his interpretation. I believe that if Tilley's interpretation affects my own too much then we have to question how valuable the approach is.
- I am also interested in assessing how those features which are obviously from the present (paths, tourist information signs, etc) affect how the site is viewed by me. I don't recall Tilley ever mentioning these in his interpretations and therefore it is impossible to assess how they might have influenced him. Tilley presents his work as if it is divorced from his own context, that is, his own identity, prior knowledge. He seems to have conducted it outside of the present, perhaps in the past or at an unidentified point in time.
- I wonder if it is possible to assess, to some degree, how much our experiences are similar.
- My research goal, while conducted using the same method at the same place, is different. How will this affect my experience of the Järrestad rock carvings?
- I haven't pre-read his conclusions at the end of his book, 'The Materiality of Stone' although I have read through it previously (over a year ago). I cannot remember any specific details about the contents of the conclusion apart from that he discusses the aims and implications of his research and details some of his research goals.



## THE APPROACH

The approach to the site is made along and through a series of modern features such as a farmer's track, a wooden gate and into the site area which is completely surrounded by a high wooden fence with electrified fencing surrounding that. The site appears to be placed in the middle of a farm. In Tilley's description of the site these most dominating facts about its position in the landscape are not mentioned at all. Of the nine photographs in the entire case study (which includes a number of other Bronze Age sites in southern Sweden), only two show any obviously modern features at all – one shows a wheat field (Tilley, 2004a:189) while another shows some low buildings, mostly concealed (Tilley, 2004a:156). I agree with Tilley's description (Tilley, 2004a:172) and the site does indeed feel isolated though not in the sense that he describes. The site feels deliberately isolated from the surrounding countryside both by being placed within a farm to which it does not belong, and by being surrounded by a modern fence on all sides.



*Fig. 5. The gate into the Järrestad site.*

## FIRST STEPS

There is the obligatory small information sign by the gate into the site area which gives details of the site including some text about the unique figure of the dancer. My next move was to head straight across the rock surface to locate this figure which is positioned in the bottom left section of the rock surface. The direct path to the dancer from the entrance cuts across the rock surface from top right to bottom left. The surface is visibly cleaner and smoother on this path, suggesting that I moved exactly as most of the tourists to the sight move. It seemed natural to go straight to the dancer given the information on the sign and wasn't something I reflected over at the time. Already my actions have



*Fig. 6. A dancer or a swimmer?*

been affected by prior knowledge; that which is printed on the information board, installed by Riksantikvarieämbetet (The Swedish Heritage Board). The 'dancer', or 'swimmer' as Tilley describes it (according to Riksantikvarieämbetet), is the site's main attraction although I'm not sure I would even have noticed it or given it special attention had the sign (and previous studies of the site) not pointed it out.

I wanted to try to see some of the structuring of the carvings as interpreted by Tilley (2004a:178-184) and others so my next move was to explore the surface by wandering, more or less at random, looking at things that caught my eye. It was difficult to see any of the structuring that is presented such studies. This is partly because many of the carvings are difficult to make out, and in partly because the surface is too large to see properly more than a tiny part of the whole when standing on it. A phenomenological study seems ill-suited to this kind of distribution analysis unless significant patterns are already well-known and familiar.

The most distinctly phenomenological contribution that Järrestad provides for the interpretations in Tilley's book is the idea that the surface appears as a series of 'frozen waves' that permeate the meanings of the carvings themselves (Tilley, 2004a:176). The dancer becomes a swimmer (Tilley, 2004a:177), footsteps relate to the sea, the surface is an inversion of the real sea; a sea of the dead). My impression, no matter how I twisted and turned this metaphor in my mind, was the complete opposite, however. The rock pavement seemed remarkably flat, especially where the carvings have been made (along the left-hand side). The right hand side, where the ripples are most visible, is completely free from carvings and there is nothing to indicate whether this part was visible at the time of the Bronze Age. Even there the ripples are not evenly spaced or sized as the waves of the sea would be, nor are they particularly clear, although grey weather at noon is the worst time of day to see such features. Why, when looking at the same surface, do I see a flat surface when Tilley sees frozen waves? Is it simply because I want to refute Tilley's conclusions in order to make my own point? Earlier in Tilley's case study (Tilley, 2004a:157) he has placed a photograph of a similar surface whose ripples really do look like the waves of the sea. Is this why he sees them here at Järrestad? In any case the root of this experiential difference lies in our different memories and goals; in short, our subjective selves.



*Fig. 7. Frozen waves on the surface?*



## SKIN AND BONES

The famous ‘skin and bones’ analogy (Tilley, 2004b:201-202) seems almost irrelevant at Järrestad. The idea appears to have originated during a field study of the Dorest landscape but the topography there (the ‘bones’) is far more dramatic than at Järrestad, where the landscape is very gently rolling. At Järrestad, the ‘skin’ (flora, cultural changes to the landscape) is relatively far thicker than it would be in the Welsh mountains, and good tree cover here would radically alter the experience of the landscape, both visually and in movement. Roads, field systems and buildings in this area have had a relatively far greater impact on the ‘bones’ of the landscape at Järrestad (see fig. 8).



*Fig. 8. Thick skin and thin bones. The gentle landscape around Järrestad*

The nature of the stone surface changes quite dramatically where tourist feet do not keep the surface nice and clean. This clearly affects our experience of the stone in ways unexplored in Tilley’s field study. The idea of the ‘skin and bones’ analogy is to establish a common bond between past and present experiences but even the thinnest ‘skin’ can change the nature of what is being experienced quite dramatically (see fig. 9 and fig. 10).



*Fig. 9. Less ‘tourist traffic’ on the pavement surface.*



*Fig. 10. Even less ‘tourist traffic’ on the pavement.*

Returning to the point about the exposure of the pavement area it appears that the area of the surface most likely to have been covered over during the Bronze Age is that area where the waves are most pronounced. This is not simply because there are no carvings to be found there (although this is a contributing factor) but because of the nature of the edges of the pavement itself. The bottom and right-hand edges disappear under the grass (fig. 11) while the top and left-hand edges stand above the grass (fig. 12).



*Fig. 11. The wavy edge of the pavement. Not very wavy, no carvings and easy for vegetation to cover it.*



*Fig. 12. The carved edge of the pavement. Flat, lots of carvings and more likely to be exposed.*



## WHAT WAS AND WHAT IS

A sense of freedom to explore the site comes first only after one's own pre-conceived questions and ideas ('Before the Trip. From Memory', p. 13) - such as any connection to the Bronze Age - have been exhausted. I then find that I am able to explore the site more on my own terms. It is difficult to put aside my prior knowledge of Tilley's (and others) work until this point is reached, however, since reading what another has to say about a place forms a pre-understanding that first needs to be tested.

The modern cultural landscape dominates every experience at the site and in the surrounding landscape and the significance of any experience to an interpretation of the Bronze Age is impossible to disentangle from the present. It is surrounded by farms, fenced in, polished by tourist feet, likely managed to keep the surface clear, the appearance of the grass is different from inside to outside the site due to differing usage (see fig. 13 and fig. 14) and there is evidence that much of the pavement might be covered by flora quite quickly were it allowed to do so (see fig. 11 and fig. 12).



Fig. 13. Outside the site area the appearance of the land is quite different...



Fig. 14. ...from the inside of the site area.

What became most strikingly obvious at Järrestad was the difficulty – if not impossibility - of separating the present-day cultural landscape from anything 'Bronze Age'. The initial stage of my investigation was about judging for myself what has been said and written about the site previously. The next was more about what might or might not have been of significance during the Bronze Age. There are, however, no observations about the Bronze Age that can be made with any certainty at all. In fact, attempting to do so within a phenomenological investigation goes against the whole point of such an investigation in the first place; that is, no pre-conceived ideas about what the place *should* be ('The Phenomenological Method', p. 11). The very fact that the site is a significant Bronze Age site is an interpretation! So undoubtedly my prior knowledge of the place has affected how I approach it. I find myself constantly referring to what I know of the place in order to judge for myself what the place might mean.

## CONCLUSION

I have tried to explore and describe all aspects of the site at Järrestad without recourse to pre-conceived ideas about what the place might be only to discover how difficult it is to put aside such preconceptions, and actually found it impossible to go beyond my pre-knowledge until my curiosity was exhausted. I have not tried to see the site *as it might have been* in the past and in fact, the phenomenological investigation of the site itself teaches us that we cannot experientially separate past from present, or date experiences to any point in time, other than the present. In order to argue that experiential evidence had relevance in the distant past we *need* to separate what *was* from what *is*, however. In order to do this our experiences of places like Järrestad must first be consciously objectified and examined against the question: 'Is this experience/observation relevant to the Bronze Age or not?' Objectifying experience is an interpretation of experience leading to a newly created narrative of an experience (see 'From The Familiar World to The Physical. Objectification', p. 8). I disagree entirely with Tilley about the both the 'frozen waves' and the 'skin and bones' metaphors, but neither are matters that must be resolved, that is, we do not need to decide which one of us is correct on these points. Although we experienced the same physical location our experiences were very different. I cannot deny him his experience of the 'frozen waves' of Järrestad and he cannot deny me mine and so in the present both ideas of the surface of the pavement stand as equally valid, at least experientially. This demonstrates that places have multiple experiential possibilities so to relate experiences in the present to the distant past is moot issue. Experiences were certainly as multiple then as they are now and any (or none) could be argued to be relevant.

In reference to the criticisms outlined above (see 'Critique of the Phenomenological Method', p. 12) the phenomenological study of Järrestad shows that the first two rather miss the point. The general criticisms outlined in Brück (2005) against the similarities between the bodies and the worlds of past and present is demonstrably irrelevant in this context. Two similar people in the same social context and at the same place can have different experiences. It simply does not matter if bodies and places are the same. Fleming's (1999) critique of the phenomenological approach as a 'dreaming' fails to give credit to the multiplicity of experience, whether past or present. His critique holds only if you believe in the past as a single 'true' narrative of events. It is the concern raised by Coudart (2006:135) seems most compelling. Whether there is a theoretical contradiction between a phenomenological approach applied to the past depends a little on whether the past really no longer exists. The past may not be a 'place' to be visited but it has been argued (Olivier, 2004), that the past exists all around us, 'mixed' with all other 'pasts' and the present and indeed this is a necessary part of Tilley's phenomenological method. Even so, if the past is in fact present then it must be separable and identifiable from *the present*, which in my experience during this field study, is a little like trying to extract the blue from a pot of green paint. The blue is always present but inseparable from green, rather, it is a part of green's constitution.

Despite the above criticism, a phenomenological approach can contribute to an understanding of the past but not at a 'short cut' to the past. By *doing* phenomenology we become far more aware of the role of experience in our lives and, I believe, is the only way to get to grips with the issues of experiencing the world. Such an understanding can lead to new interpretations of the past and the following case study will explore just such possibilities.

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## CASE 2. ABANDONED PLACES

In the previous case study a prehistoric site, the Bronze Age rock carvings at Järrestad, was visited and the multiplicity of experience that any place can inspire was demonstrated. The same place can be ‘seen’ in many different ways. An archaeological site also has multiple uses and meanings throughout time in prehistory (e.g.; Godsen & Lock, 1998), up to and including the present day, when a place can even become the site of legend, parties and archaeological investigation (e.g.; Holtorf, 1998).

Many texts within archaeology and the social sciences in general discuss spaces and places, and their roles in human life (e.g.; Bourdieu, 1980; Giddens, 1984; Moore, 1996; Tilley, 1994, 2004a, 2004b; Thomas, 1999) from different perspectives. What is common amongst them, and of particular interest here, is the interrelation between people and places, in that both are constituted by the other. Space can be structured according to ideals and practical considerations but then people and their ideals are also structured according to the places and spaces they experience. What is clear, especially from the anthropological field work of Bourdieu (1980) and Moore (1996), is that the process of ‘decoding’ the structure of places cannot be done without reference to the people that dwell within them. In short, our identities are also formed according to the places we experience. We cannot therefore talk about places without reference to how they were (and are) used, and by whom.

### AIM

The aim of this, the second, case study, is to explore a specific *kind* of place - abandoned places - and the kinds of experiences that can occur within them. In human experience, abandoned places are also a part of an *act of abandonment* and the *experience of abandoning* are not separable. This is an obvious point but rarely acknowledged or explored within archaeology, perhaps due to the material nature of the archaeological record. It is important nonetheless to recognize that interpreting archaeological sites we are also interpreting human experiences.

In order to achieve this aim, examples of actions and experiences in abandoned places from contemporary archaeological sources will be discussed in terms of their experiential content. The prehistoric phenomenon to be explored is the apparent abandonment of the early Neolithic long houses of central Europe and their connection to the long barrows in Atlantic Europe.

It must be made clear that the aim is not to draw ethnographic parallels between past and present in terms of universal behavior or emotional responses to abandoned places but to examine experiential processes involving memory, identity, familiarity and objectification, and to see how these processes might contribute to the interpretation of the past.



## EXPERIENCING ABANDONED PLACES

As areas of study, abandoned places have attracted much research in recent years. Some focus on the economic history such places represent (e.g.; Jörnmark, 2007) while others focus on the activities of people and what these activities reflect about society (e.g.; Edensor, 2004). While modern western society usually considers abandoned houses and factories to be dangerous wastelands and marked as ‘off limits’ they actually give rise to a wide range of human activities including plundering, home-making and adventurous play (Edensor, 2004:21-51). In reality they are places where social rules are radically different or even non-existent. Such places often give rise to their own urban legends such as the existence of the mole people in the New York underground subway systems (Dupler, 1994), or the ghosts that are said to inhabit abandoned houses (e.g.; Edensor 2004:1).



Fig. 15. Haunted House or abandoned dwelling?

## REVISITING THE PAST. IDENTITY

Sven Lindqvist’s book ‘Gräv där du står’ (Lindqvist, 1978) [trans. ‘Dig Where You Stand’] is about how to research the workplace, or - rather - *your* workplace, from the perspective of the worker. In a section entitled ‘The Journey Back’ (Lindqvist, 1978:13-16) he describes a trip to an abandoned English cement factory where he met an ex-cement worker called Cyril Edwards who, for 25 years, used to work at the factory. As Cyril enters into the abandoned factory his past suddenly returns to him and he eagerly explores the rooms, rusting machinery and instruments that remain. As his hands move over the wrecked, useless equipment he remembers his work, stories, friends and emotions that were so strongly connected to the place and had all but been forgotten until his return.

*‘He walks up to the hole in the furnace where he stood and stared into the glowing mass. Now what he stares into is a cold darkness. He checks, as usual, the instrument panel. Now it hangs loose, yanked from the wall and the dials swing, abandoned, this way and that in the wind... That hits him the hardest. The instruments that he stood and observed for 25 years with such care and responsibility, ready to instantly react to the smallest change, the instruments that meant everything now dangle in the wind and mean nothing.’  
(Lindqvist, 1978:15, my translation)*

Although Burström (2007) uses this example to talk about the power that objects have to recall lost memories, he doesn’t try to explain how such places and objects become such potent symbols in the first place. Here, we can consider in more depth the theory of experience (‘The World of Memory and Identity’, p. 6). For Cyril, the activities of 25 years play out themselves again in the abandoned factory. In Thomas’ (Thomas, 1999:36) terms he is re-enacting a ‘habitual use of space’, a habit learned and reinforced throughout his time at the factory. The use of space,

according to Thomas, is intimately tied to the creation of identity so in effect, the re-enacting of acts performed in his past are a reassertion of his own personal identity. So identity and place really *are* connected, the vivid memories that return are a part of Cyril's identity and his actions demonstrate the interrelation between identity and practice.

Seeing familiar objects in an unfamiliar context often triggers strong reactions precisely because when embedded within their usual 'familiar' context we barely notice them at all until they are 'unworlded' or brought to our attention ('From The Familiar World to The Physical. Objectification', p. 8). Exactly that happens to Cyril, forcing him to see them again and to consider their purpose and his own identity. Cyril's experience of the abandoned cement factory is undoubtedly defined by what it was to him for 25 years. It is a place of the past, of work, and a place intimately tied to his identity through friendships, shared experiences and social action.



*Fig. 16. An abandoned cement factory.*

## EXPLORING ABANDONED PLACES

The originally intended functions of places such as cement factories, do not determine the role they play in the creation of identities. Urban Adventuring is a surprisingly popular activity where ‘urban adventurers’ specifically seek out restricted areas, such as abandoned factories, tunnels, train stations, hospitals, schools and breweries, all in search of new experiences. Urban Adventurers themselves have constructed codes of ethics to legitimize their activity (Ninjalicious, No Date).

The attraction of exploring such places is excitement, an excitement that is born of breaking social rules and seeing things that are not otherwise accessible to the general public. The experience of urban adventuring cannot be had through socially sanctioned action – guided tours of abandoned ruins are often used for reconnaissance purposes – and so an important part is the deliberate breaking of social rules (Ninjalicious, 2005).

So once again, the plurality of places, demonstrated in the first case study, becomes apparent as does the interrelation between people and place. For urban adventurers seeking excitement and adventure any particular abandoned cement factory is, in a sense, much like another. To Cyril, who has so many memories and experiences of a specific place, the cement factory means everything. Their actions and experiences within the same place are vastly different. The role the place plays in the construction of identity is very different, and each person’s identity produces different actions.

*‘I find it sad that most people go through life oblivious to the countless – free – wonders around them. Too many of us think the only things worth looking at in our cities and towns are those safe and sanitized attractions that require an admission fee. It’s no wonder people feel unfulfilled as they shuffle through the maze of velvet ropes on their way out through the gift shop. Urban explorers strive to actually earn their experiences, by making discoveries that allow them to get in on the secret workings of cities and structures, and to appreciate fantastic, obscure spaces that might otherwise go completely neglected.’ (Ninjalicious, No Date)*



Fig. 17. Urban adventurer in an abandoned Russian cement factory

## THE ABANDONED LONG HOUSES OF NEOLITHIC EUROPE

It has been well-documented that throughout the early Neolithic period of central and south-eastern Europe, the inhabitants of settlements would periodically abandon their houses and build new ones close-by. These houses stood year after year slowly decaying, or were deliberately burned and left to collapse. The new were not built on the same location as the older buildings; they almost never overlapped and the old building materials were apparently not reused. This means that sometimes the abandoned houses would remain fully visible in their decay, as part of the village (Bradley, 1996).

These ‘The Houses of the Dead’ and the similarities between long houses and long mounds is an idea that can be traced back to Gordon Childe (1949:135) and numerous theories have been put forth as to why this might be so. As Tringham makes clear (right) when a house reaches the end of its use-life, in archaeological reports, is assumed to have simply ceased to exist. Its continued existence is rarely discussed and neither is the impact an event such as abandonment might have on its inhabitants.

The modern examples presented above (see ‘Revisiting The Past. Identity’ and ‘Exploring Abandoned Places’) demonstrate that just because a place is abandoned it doesn’t mean that activity within it ceases, and that such places can have a great deal of power over the individuals that dwelt within them.

*Many dramatic changes in social life undoubtedly accompanied those terms that we write so blithely: “the household in the decline and at the end of its cycle” and “the end of the use-life of a house”. It is tempting to envisage the whole process of abandoning old houses and locating and constructing new ones coldly and objectively. Recent ethnographic and non-Western architectural studies, however, abound with accounts of the significant impact that these processes have on the lives of the men and women involved. A “house” is part of their social lives, with a life-cycle of its own, even to the extent of being a person.’ (Tringham, 1991:123-124)*



## LONG HOUSE SETTLEMENT SITES

The geographical extent of the settlements in Europe that practiced the construction of long houses range from the Olszanica settlement in Poland to within a few kilometers of the west coast of France (Laporte & Tinévez, 2004), with many of the key sites existing in Germany such as the Merzbach and Langweiler settlements in eastern Germany (Bradley, 1996). There is much evidence of abandonment at these sites. At Opovo, Serbia (Tringham, et al., 1992) all the houses were burned but at different times, thus ruling out accidental fires, whereas at Laurenzberg the average life-use of the house was 27 years, far less time than construction of the house would allow. Additionally, there is no evidence that the house materials were reused. So it appears that these houses were deliberately abandoned (Bradley, 1996:247). It is clear that the houses, far from ‘disappearing’ after abandonment, remain in plain sight within the villages long after the event, perhaps giving rise to the ‘basic idea of the long barrow.’ (Bradley 1996:248).



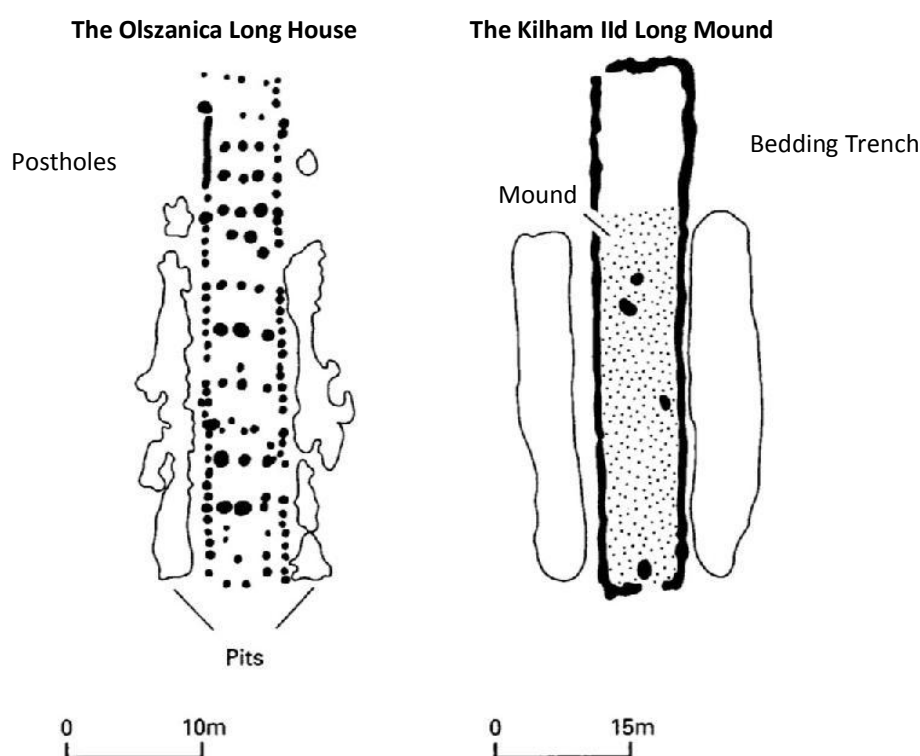
Fig. 18. Extent of long house construction in Neolithic Europe.

## LONG BARROW SITES



Fig. 19. Extent of long barrow and long cairn sites in Neolithic Europe.

As stated, the abandoned long houses of the Neolithic of Central Europe have been referred to as ‘Houses of the Dead’ (e.g.; Hodder, 1990; Bradley, 1996; Sherratt, 1990) and the connection between the long houses and long mounds of northern Europe goes as far back as Oscar Montelius. The role of the houses after abandonment is not expanded upon. The argument that a connection exists between the two phenomena lies in their structural similarities. Hodder (1984) lists eight points of similarity between the houses of central Europe and the long mounds of northern Europe, based on the physical dimensions and other features of both. Indeed, during excavation it is not always easy to tell one from the other exemplified by the famous long mound at Barkaer, Denmark, which was originally interpreted as a house and only later reinterpreted as a long mound (Glob, 1975).



*Fig. 20. Comparison of a long house from Olszanica, Poland and the long barrow at Kilham, England. Taken from Bradley (1996:243)*

There are currently two geographical candidates where mounds and houses coexist, and thus the idea of long houses as ‘houses of the dead’ might have spread to Atlantic Europe. The first is in Poland where there is a cultural overlap (Hodder, 1990:148, Bradley, 1996) allowing the spread of the idea of ‘houses of the dead’ to long mound construction in the Polish lowlands. An alternative location is in France (Laporte & Tinévez, 2004) where, as in the case of the Balloy excavation south of Paris, a long barrow was built directly on top of a destroyed long house (Scarre, 2005:418). So within the archaeological record there is enough evidence to suggest that there is a connection between long houses and long mounds. The next question to answer is why.



The key problem with many explanations as to why Neolithic monuments were built are that they rely upon the idea that the establishment of farming requires a greater degree of social control (e.g.; Sherratt, 1990; Renfrew, 1976), whether because of increased social complexity or increased territorial competition. The need for either is debatable, however, since the extent to which farming existed, the abundance of food resources and the population densities in the Neolithic cultures of Atlantic Europe (Milisauskas, 2002:156) suggest that there simply isn't a convincing functional argument that these were serious concerns. As Hodder (1984) famously stated, people are not fooled by ideology; simply because a possibility exists does not mean it would be followed. In such functional accounts it is therefore not people who are the prime motivators but history itself. If there is no functional necessity behind the construction of monuments as centres for institutionalised activity then the idea would need some other resonance within society. Monuments remarkably similar to long houses *were*, after all, built in Atlantic Europe and coincide with the introduction of farming. Collective monument building might therefore facilitate, or even trigger increased social complexity but where did the idea come from?

*'It can ... be argued that these tombs...were as basic a feature of early cereal agriculture as the hoe and axe: the material infrastructure of the organization of labour was crucial in the establishment of horticulture as the more obvious elements of technology ... In a society where labour was the most important commodity, moving large stones symbolized the workforce that could be assembled at any one time.'*  
(Sherratt, 1990:150)

In structuralist interpretations of the same evidence the ideologies of prehistoric people dominates their motivations. Hodder's (1990) interpretation presents a far more sophisticated explanation for the process involved in the transfer of the idea of the 'house of the dead' into Atlantic European cultures but, as Bradley (1996:246) points out 'it is difficult to see how such changes were effected. Who devised them, and why did they come to mind?'

*'The built environment is not simply a representation of a set of abstract ideas. It is through their engagement with that environment in the course of daily life that individuals learn how to become members of society.'* Bradley (1996:246)

*'The everyday experience of living in a settlement where many of the houses had been abandoned might have been enough to create an association between the form of the long house and the celebration of the dead.'*  
(Bradley, 1996:250)

It is Bradley's (1996) interpretation that provides the best explanation for this 'transfer of ideas'. He argues that it is the continued presence of these monuments in the everyday lives of the inhabitants of these settlements that gave birth to the idea of the houses of the dead. As stated earlier, these houses – though abandoned – would have remained in full sight, slowly decaying. The long mounds were 'meant to evoke the past significance of the long house' (Bradley, 1996:246). What remains in this interpretation is to explain why the long houses were so evocative and how this might have lead to increased social complexity.

## THE POWER OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

Unlike modern day abandoned places (see ‘Exploring Abandoned Places’, p. 24) there is little or no evidence to suggest continued activity in the ruins of the abandoned long houses. Edensor (2005) and the urban adventurers demonstrate, however, that contemporary abandoned places cannot automatically be assumed to be outside of society since they still play a variety of roles. The act of abandonment is, at its most abstract, a deliberate transformation of a place’s social role. Plainly as ‘houses of the dead’ the houses are not abandoned at all but still play a role in people’s identities. It is also important to point out that the power of such events is not necessarily felt by everyone in the settlement and depends very much on the roles each person plays along with their own motivations for action (e.g.; Edensor, 2005; Moore, 1996). This opens the door for meanings to change throughout time as different people and social groups, with differing ideas and experiences vie for expression. All this can happen without the need for cataclysmic external events or influences.

Familiarity with a place comes through the constant action of the tasks that define everyday life. Places and identities form and develop each other and it is often through the sudden disruption of everyday life that we recognize it fully. The long houses of the Neolithic were without doubt places full of memories and intimately interwoven with the identities of the people who dwelt in them. They are participants in the process of the identity creation in daily practice. The abandonment of a dwelling is a powerful event in human life, not simply because of its symbolic significance but because it is such a fundamental part of a person’s identity; Cyril’s return to the cement factory (‘Revisiting The Past. Identity’, p. 22) demonstrates clearly the power such places have. *Abandonment*, whether joyful, sad or amusing, is powerful in a way that structuralism or functionalism can’t capture. It is important to point out that the argument for powerful experience is not based on some notion of sentimentality of the part of past people at the loss of a family home; experiences are contextual, different for everyone (see ‘The Trip. Frozen Waves or Muddy Waters?’, p. 15). The argument is based on the sudden transformation of the intimately familiar, where lived, naturalized experience has been embedded in individual identities to a new place where different social rules apply. The powerful experiences surrounding such events make it a good candidate for ‘recycling’ into other forms as ideologies change and thus lends weight to Bradley’s interpretation of abandoned houses. This power provides a specific reason why Long Mounds took the form that they did.

## THE POWER OF MEMORY

Using Nora’s (1989) division between memory and history, the long mounds could therefore represent a ‘lieux de memoire’ and the construction of a controlled history of ancestry through institutionalized ritual practice. Access to the houses of the dead suddenly occurs under specifically controlled forms. Thus the bodily movement of people is controlled but further, the memory of people’s ancestors is rooted in an environment other than where lived experiences and memories were played out (the house). This ‘softens’ the bonds between place, action and identity. The long house no longer plays a part in the memory of the ancestor’s, where contact

between the living and the dead (once living) was actually played out. A history of the ancestors can be now used to replace memory. It would be the appropriation of a powerful act, an excellent choice upon which to build or support a more institutionalized form of ritual.

There is no need to argue for a pre-existing need to appropriate the memory and ritual practices surrounding the worship of ancestors, which would necessitate the building of large communal monuments, however. If monuments became 'lieux de memoire' then they might simply have created the opportunity to institutionalize ritual practice, thus focusing social control in a few hands.

## WAYS FORWARD

Ultimately we really don't know why these Neolithic long houses were abandoned and what significance they had afterwards. We don't know if they were forbidden territory or continued to serve another role in society, but it is likely that some human activity, either sanctioned or subversive, continued in some form. While existing in memory they would still have a power over the village inhabitants and act as foci for various activities. People saw them, ignored them acted around them, etc.

1. Could the houses be entered again?
2. Did children do it anyway for kicks? Or adults?
3. How might they have triggered memories of the past? Of friends and family?
4. Were memories treasured, of good times or bad?
5. What of the sense of entering such places? Was their fear and/or a thrill when entering forbidden zones, even if no physical barrier prevented it?

Perhaps the archaeological record should be examined again in more detail, looking for evidence that might illuminate alternative activities at such sites, even after they apparently went out of use.

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## CONCLUSION

Objects and places are far more than functional devices or symbols for shared meanings. They are most often an intimately familiar part of our lives, embedded and inseparable from our projects within the world and our very identities. The largest part of what an object *was* to people in the past is gone because the people of the past are gone. There is an ‘experiential gap’. Ruth Tringham’s (1991:124) fictional account of the Neolithic long house fire at Opovo (presented in the introduction to this essay) is an attempt to illustrate ‘the facelessness’ of people in our accounts of the past, and this facelessness is due to this ‘gap’. Attempts to use fictional narratives in interpretations of the past can only ever raise awareness of it, but never fill it.

There is no need to turn to fiction when an understanding of human experience can help us to do so. No matter how we try, descriptions of past lives, and the explanations for those lives, will remain at best two-dimensional until we explicitly recognize the inseparability of places, things and people, and their thoughts, motivations and ideals. These experiences are always mutable and multiple.

The relationship between people and things can radically differ, and that arguing for experiential similarities across vast time-spaces is therefore highly problematic. Personal experience of a thing can never produce an understanding of that thing that another might have without first discussing who this ‘other’ is and what their motivations are for being there. The constitution of experience, as an inseparable mix of mind, body and the world prevents the identification of ‘prehistoric’ experiences in the present. The past simply cannot be experienced and therefore if we want to put human experience back into the past we need to be wary of using *personal* experiences to do so.

Of course there is no likely correlation between activities in modern abandoned factories and the abandoned longhouses of Neolithic Europe and this essay does not represent an attempt to draw ethnographic parallels between our culture and a prehistoric one. It demonstrates, though, that change and the appropriation or alteration of activities and beliefs for new ends can easily be motivated by the power that certain experiences have on us. The deliberate abandonment of a dwelling is a powerful event that has experiential resonance.

Additionally this case study provides clear examples that abandonment does not necessarily mean forgotten or erased. It is a transformation of social rules, permitting different forms of behavior, and thus we can radically alter the meanings of places at will. The same place can be experienced and acted within in fundamentally different ways. This suggests that archaeologists should look again at the Neolithic long houses of central Europe in particular, and the life histories of other prehistoric sites in general, in order to discuss their continued roles within societies.

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