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RESEARCH

Thinking Through Living: Experience and the Production of Archaeological Knowledge

Michelle Charest, Department of Anthropology, Brown University, Box 1921, Providence, RI 02912, USA
E-mail: Michelle_Charest@brown.edu

ABSTRACT

As archaeologists, we tend to forget the extent to which our everyday experiences frame our potential understandings of past cultures. Instead of being taken for granted, such experiences need to be explored so that we may more fully acknowledge how our own pasts have an eminent role in the production of archaeological knowledge, from the methods through which we recover and record our data to the kinds of investigations we deem worthy of effort. While our decisions and thought processes are readily recognized to have had genesis in the archaeological and theoretical approaches which came before, an entire body of cultural and experiential knowledge remains ignored. In the interest of addressing this disparity, meticulous reflexive investigations of the day-to-day world of the individual archaeologist can be used to provide insights into the less formal factors informing research trajectories, by providing alternative viewpoints and bringing hidden components of experience to light. This paper discusses a critical thinking exercise which examines the utility of deep descriptions of contemporary commonplace experiences, employing a variety of media and documentation techniques, in assessing our interpretations of the past. A case study of 'The Virtual Pub Project' illustrates the practical application of this approach.

Résumé: En tant qu'archéologues, nous avons tendance à oublier l'étendue selon laquelle nos expériences de chaque jour encadrent nos compréhensions potentielles des cultures passées. Au lieu d'être prises pour argent comptant, de telles expériences doivent être explorées de telle manière que nous pourrons pleinement connaître comment nos passés personnels ont un rôle éminent dans la connaissance archéologique, des méthodes grâce auxquelles nous restaurons et enregistrons nos données des diverses investigations que nous jugeons digne d'effort. Tandis que nos processus de décisions et de pensée sont volontiers reconnus pour avoir eu leur genèse dans les approches archéologiques et théoriques antérieures, une organisation entière de connaissance culturelle et expérimentale reste

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ignorée. Dans l'intérêt d'aborder cette disparité, des investigations méticuleuses réfléchies du monde au jour le jour de l'archéologue peuvent être utilisées pour donner un aperçu des facteurs les moins formels informant les pistes de recherche, en présentant des points de vue différents et en mettant à jour des composantes d'expériences cachées Cet article traite d'un exercice de pensée critique qui examine l'utilité de descriptions en profondeur d'expériences contemporaines banales, en employant une variété de médias et documentations techniques, en évaluant nos interprétations du passé. Un cas d'étude de « The Virtual Pub Project » illustre l'application pratique de cette approche.

Resumen: Como arqueólogos, tendemos a olvidar lo mucho que nuestras experiencias cotidianas marcan nuestros conocimientos potenciales de las culturas pasadas. En lugar de darlas por sentadas, es necesario analizar esas experiencias para poder reconocer debidamente que nuestros propios pasados tienen un papel preponderante en la obtención del conocimiento arqueológico, a partir de los métodos con los que recuperamos y registramos nuestros datos con los tipos de investigaciones que consideramos dignas de esfuerzo. Si bien se reconoce fácilmente que nuestras decisiones y los procesos de pensamientos han tenido una génesis en los enfoques arqueológicos y teóricos que vinieron antes, todavía queda un buen corpus de conocimiento cultural y de experiencias ignorado. Con el fin de solucionar esta disparidad, las investigaciones reflexivas meticulosas del mundo diario de cada arqueólogo pueden servir para profundizar en factores menos formales que conformen las trayectorias de la investigación, ofreciendo puntos de vista alternativos y sacando a la luz los componentes ocultos de la experiencia. En este trabajo se comenta un ejercicio crítico de pensamiento que examina la utilidad de las descripciones de las experiencias comunes contemporáneas, empleando distintos medios y técnicas documentales para evaluar nuestras interpretaciones del pasado. Un estudio de caso del "Proyecto Virtual Pub" ilustra la aplicación práctica de este enfoque.

KEYWORDS

Experience, Media, Documentation, Ethnoarchaeology, Public House

Introduction

Archaeologists are creatures of the present. No amount of looking to the past will ever change the fact that we live, well, *now*. Yet, somehow we

seem to forget the extent to which everyday experiences frame our interpretations of any of the past cultures we study. Certain research techniques such as ethnoarchaeology do acknowledge the value of present-day experiences to archaeological interpretation, but are typically applied to circumstances in which we do not seem to innately identify with the cultural experiences being studied.

It is important, however, to recognize the commonplace experiences of the archaeologist as well. Instead of being taken for granted, such experiences need to be explored reflexively (eg. Beck 1992; Beck et al. 1994, 2003; Giddens 1990) so that we may acknowledge how our own pasts influence in the production of archaeological knowledge, from the methods through which we recover and record our data, to the kinds of investigations we deem worthy of effort. It is unfortunate that while our decisions and thought processes are understood to be influenced by the archaeological and theoretical approaches which came before, at the same time an entire body of cultural knowledge and experience is ignored. In the interest of addressing this disparity, meticulous investigations of the day-to-day world of the individual archaeologist can be used to provide insights into the less formal factors informing research trajectories, by providing alternative viewpoints and bringing hidden components of experience to light.

It could be argued that efforts in exploring the everyday as a component of the production of archaeological knowledge fit squarely within the realm of ethnoarchaeology (Gonzalez-Ruibal 2006; Lucas 2007). Susan Kent, for example, described the goals of ethnoarchaeology: "to formulate and test archaeologically oriented and/or derived methods, hypotheses, models and theories with ethnographic data" (1987:37). Kent emphasized a cycle of investigation beginning with archaeological research interest, leading to ethnographic investigation, back to archaeological research, and so on. This broad definition clearly provides sufficient room for a wide range of investigative goals, as well as source material, including ethnographic research into the everyday life of the archaeologist. And yet, it would appear that this is far from the standard focus of ethnoarchaeology, which ostensibly aims to collect ethnographic data from the world of the present day, but primarily *not* from the archaeologist's own 'ordinary' culture (although refer to Edgeworth 2003, 2006; Ochs et al. 2006; Owens et al. 2008).

With this interest in the 'ordinary' in mind, research on the topic of *everyday life* also has been found to be a useful approach to understanding contemporary culture (Chaney 2002; De Certeau 2002; De Certeau et al. 1998; Gardiner 2000; Lefebvre 1992, 2000), the world in which archaeological research is conducted. It is through interactions with the objects and practices of the day-to-day that a larger culture is enacted (De Certeau 2002). Nevertheless, it is a challenge for the social scientist to sufficiently remove his- or herself from the social world in order to study it

(Crow and Pope 2008:598). One of the ways this separation is accomplished practically within the fields of sociology and anthropology is through the examination of numerous individuals, as well general observations about the everyday within a particular society to inform the overall research goal (eg. Michael 2006; Moran 2005; Ross 1995; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Silva and Bennett 2004). Yet it is clear in these investigations that there is utility in drawing from deep investigations of particular individuals as well to inform upon larger social environments, such as McClintock's (1995) examination of Olive Schreiner in her study of Victorian colonial attitudes. It is this particularized approach that the current paper adopts, focusing on the individual everyday experience of the archaeologist as a source of information about that archaeologist's process of knowledge creation.

Employing the example of the Virtual Pub Project, this paper presents what is essentially a thinking exercise: an archaeologist can look at a present-day experience and use it to help understand how she thinks about past experience. What I hope to suggest here, and to illustrate through my documentation of the Virtual Pub Project, an examination of the sensory world of a contemporary American pub, is that our own typical everyday life experiences are just as much a part of our interpretation of archaeological materials as any other form of influence. The following discussions also examine the utility of deep descriptions of commonplace, personal experiences, employing a variety of media and recording techniques, in assessing the divergent and often unacknowledged preconceptions which inform our interpretations of the past. The intention here is not to generate ethnographic data that can be inserted directly into archaeological contexts (see discussion in Lucas 2007); rather the goal is simply to be open to how our own personal perceptions are constituted so that they are no longer unintentionally projected into situations where they do not belong.

The Convergence of Experience and Understanding

What is 'experience'? In the interest of clarity, it is appropriate to define to some extent the concept at the center of this discussion. For the purpose of this paper, a fairly simple dictionary definition is employed in an effort to sidestep some of the scholarly baggage associated with the term (see Witmore 2005:58–59 for a review of archaeological approaches to experience). Thus, experience is defined as "something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through" (Merriam-Webster 2008). From a more philosophical standpoint, such a definition employs a certain interest in "being-in-the-world," though not in a strict Heidegerrian sense (eg. Heidegger 1978; in archaeology refer to Thomas 1996; Tilley 1994).

Definitions aside, there is perhaps some apprehension regarding the utility of the integration of everyday experience as a component of archaeological research (Shanks 1992; Thomas 1996). A useful starting point in addressing such concerns is to call attention to the fact that, in reality, all our interpretations of archaeological data are inevitably influenced by our own personal life experiences and knowledge—whether we are aware of it or not (Edgeworth 2003; Hodder 1999, 2003; Wylie 2002). This self-critical approach is a component of larger sociological theory on reflexive modernization (Beck 1992; Beck et al. 1994, 2003), which calls for the interrogation of truth and realities based upon the contexts in which they exist (Giddens 1990). As such, investigation into the social and historical contexts of the archaeologist is an essential aspect of a well-informed program of research (Adams and Brooke 1995; Hodder 2003; Tilley 1993). Influences on archaeological interpretation may thus be formally generated through, for example, institutional education, or informally through the more diffuse impact of the overall social environment. In the latter case, confirmation bias may play a significant role in the creation of personal knowledge.

Drawn from cognitive science, 'confirmation bias' refers to the idea that, humans always want to understand new things in light of an existing frame of reference, typically to confirm our own understanding of how the world works (D'Andrade 1995; Hutchins 1995). If new information does not quite fit in with this understanding, we tend to unwittingly ignore, discredit or alter the information in a way so that it makes sense within that framework. This is a natural bias, which encourages us to stick with what we already know to be true—a hindrance, in a sense, to innovation and creative thinking. In other words, we inherently naturalize our own world and resist evidence contrary to that naturalization. An example of the influence of this tendency within archaeological contexts can be seen in the 19th century investigations of the mound builders of ancient North America. During that period of archaeological research, European-American scholars interpreted the impressive burial mounds found throughout the continent to have been the creations of an advanced lost race of 'mound builders' rather than by ancestors of contemporary Native American peoples. These scholars found it improbable that the Native Americans they encountered could have ever been capable of such feats (McGuire 1992). Instead, confirmation bias incorrectly encouraged the creation of the mound builder myth, which accommodated European-American ideas of a subordinate and un-developed Native American culture. These misconceptions were eventually corrected.

In fact, it is entirely possible to overcome confirmation bias through a reflexive approach to knowledge acquisition. The first step toward this liberation is simple acknowledgment of the existence of confirmation bias.

This can occur unconsciously under certain circumstances. For example, we are more open to ideas in conflict with our preconceptions when they address formally learned information rather than socially conditioned mentalities and behaviors. For the most part, however, this must be a conscious effort.

Confirmation bias in this regard is not necessarily a negative aspect of human cognition. It allows for communication shorthand, tied in deeply with our use of language. Lackoff and Johnson's (1980) discussion of language as metaphor, for example, suggests how deeply our understanding of the world is tied into the words we use to discuss it. The word 'chair' means so much more than just its dictionary definition. 'Chair' is the sum of our prior experiences with 'chair' and its own role in a greater worldview. And amongst those with similar cultural backgrounds, we don't need to discuss those details—the shorthand of a single word is sufficient.

The key here is the phrase "with similar cultural backgrounds." Within the world of archaeology, the people we study are of *different* cultural backgrounds. That shorthand, in essence, is no longer fully appropriate. Yes, it is perfectly fine for communication between archaeologists—our language would be rendered rather ineffectual if we were to define every word we used in the course of conversation (see discussion in Edgeworth 2003; Tilley 1989). Still, it seems useful in certain circumstances to consider our own metaphoric understandings of words and ideas and to evaluate how they might diverge from such understandings in the past (eg. Ingold 2004). It is only by setting aside our own confirmation bias that we can gain a deeper insight into past ways of life.

This is not so much an issue of terminology and definition, as it is of those extraneous bits and pieces of experience which become imbedded in our preconceptions of words and concepts (Latour 1999). For example, my definition of 'house' is probably not that different from that of an inhabitant of colonial North America. Yet all the minute details of what I expect a house to be, which are based upon my entire history of experiences with houses, may be drastically different from those expected by that same colonist—conceptions of air temperature and freshness, acoustics, colors of walls versus colors of furniture, textures of flooring, which activities are appropriate and where, the volume of one's voice, etc. Likewise, it is likely that my understanding of 'pub' is rather different from that of an inhabitant of 19th-century rural Ireland, as discussed below through the Virtual Pub Project.

Minute details are important, and something is lost when they become a forgotten aspect of an understood conception of experience (Ingold 2000; Stahl 2002). Just because we naturally take much of the state of our own world for granted, does not mean we should do the same as we examine the past. Thus, as we standardize our interpretations of the past through

overuse of this shorthand, alternative means of viewing that past become lost in the shuffle of data accumulation. As a result, it is necessary to examine the production of such archaeological knowledge—how we record our past—as it directly informs how we interpret and understand our world (Bolter and Grusin 1999; Bowker 2005; Edgeworth 2003; Lock 2003; Tringham et al. forthcoming).

It is useful, then, to reflexively reexamine our conceptions of the everyday as we apply them to the past. To contemplate the minutiae of the day-to-day so that our interpretations might be liberated from our biases and preconceptions about the world. Yet, rather than declare our experiences as a source for bias, why not just go one step further and embrace those experiences outright—using them as an actual data set? The word 'bias' has a negative connotation, as reflexive data these experiences are celebrated—and it all comes down to how they are used. In the context of the excavation, the reflexive approach to archaeological investigation employed at Çatalhöyük provides a thorough means of addressing the pre-understandings which affect our interpretations (Hodder 2000; Morgan 2009; Tringham 2005). I argue in my study of the pub experience—from sipping a pint to scraping a chair across a wooden floor—that such reflexivity can be extended much further from the site to the more pedestrian components of the lives of the archaeologists who work there to what sorts of everyday experiences am I referring? Certainly this discussion can apply to any form of lived experience that can, in any way, be seen as parallel to the archaeological investigation at hand, with no particular temporal or geographical restrictions. In order to limit the scope of this paper, however, I will focus on those mundane, unremarkable moments of the day-to-day, such as walking down a street, taking a bath, sitting by a fire or shopping for groceries (eg. De Certeau et al. 1998). While these experiences are situated well within the present day, there are many observable sensory components of these experiences which are not particularly affected by different temporal or geographical contexts—experiences which are unconsciously applied to archaeological analyses.

For example, familiar components of a bath, which might lead to preconceptions regarding experience in the study of Roman Baths could include understandings of temperature, wetness, slippery surfaces, scents, and the sound of water. Such preconceptions *perhaps* do not take away from an acknowledgement that bathing in a modern bathtub and in a Roman Bath are difference experiences as a whole. Being unaware of these preconceptions may lead potential routes of investigation to be unknowingly discarded; perhaps acoustics deserve more attention, or textures, or perceptions of the flavor of water, or attitudes toward wetness. This sort of simple experience can inadvertently generate a great deal of information, which ideally can be acknowledged by a sufficiently self-aware archaeolo-

gist. Further, by expanding archaeological inquiry more fully into the realm of sensory experience, in acknowledging all of the senses, we can move toward a more comprehensive view of the past (Classen 1993; Howes 2006; Ingold 2000; Latour 1986; Pallasmaa 1996; Porteous 1990; Rodaway 1994; Stoller 1989).

Approaching simple lived experiences from the point of view of a question of archaeological/historical significance, an example is provided in the following inquiry: how far can you really see in the dark with the light of just one candle? Such was, after all, a typical nocturnal condition in the days before electric light, thus fairly archaeologically pertinent. The answer to this question can be simple: not far. Yet, this answer is based upon memory, modern conceptions of distance, a conglomeration of all one's experiences with candles in the past, a sort of standardized and sterilized understanding. As a result, there is a level of conjecture involved in such an answer. Instead of adopting the simple route to this conclusion, I offer an alternative: sit in the dark with a candle and observe, record. How far does the light project really? What objects recede from vision? How long does it take for eyes to adjust to the dark? By contemplating lived sensory experience in a formal manner, as we would with other forms of archaeological investigation, it is possible to develop research trajectories addressing an even broader range of past activities to include even those which are more commonly seen as inconsequential.

An interest in lived experience as means of informing archaeological research necessarily borrows from phenomenology (see Brück 2005; Tilley 2005). Drawing from Merleau-Ponty (2002), phenomenology embraces the idea that the body interprets the world based upon its existing contexts, histories and preconceptions leading to a constantly reworked and personalized reality. Yet, one of the major drawbacks of phenomenology is the supremacy given to the body as the direct means of interacting with the world (Hodder 1999; Meskell 1996). This creates a clear bifurcation between the human body and nature, with experiences mediated through material culture being largely ignored (Webmoor and Witmore 2008).

A less strict interpretation of phenomenology, a sort of picking and choosing of concepts, can be useful, as in Don Ihde's "post-phenomenology" to address some of the failings of phenomenological theory. Ihde pulls from phenomenology the understanding that,

> whatever one "experiences" is derived not from introspection but from the "what" and "how" of the "external" or environmental context in relation to embodied experience. In this sense [Phenomenology] is "relativistic" in an approximation to an Einsteinian relativity where all observations must take into account the situatedness and positionality of the observer plus the

> observed…. Phenomenology investigates the conditions of what makes things appear as such (Ihde 2003:133).

Thus, in embracing this concept of relativity it is necessary to eschew all absolutes in examinations of the world and to accept a more fluid understanding of reality. Devoted phenomenologists tend to employ such statements to indicate that reality is entirely about perception, suggesting that empiricism plays no role. This view is rather extreme; a more open approach seems more appropriate in archaeological research. Alternatively, post-phenomenology allows for the melding, to an extent, of this phenomenology with a more pragmatic approach (eg. Dewey 2003). Post-phenomenology also does not limit itself to the realm of conscious experience as is encouraged by Latour (1993), leading to a broader set of potential interpretations. Thus, physical components of reality can embody a multiplicity of roles reliant upon the particularities of context. Such analysis allows us to "open up research possibilities, to begin to see opportunities, and to be able to take into account and appreciate alternative 'positionalities'" (Hickman 2008:101). Through the exploration of the great variations of experience which may be embodied by an object or space, by breaking down experience into its specific components and contexts, the examples discussed from the Virtual Pub Project move forward from this philosophical grounding.

On Documentation

With a conception of the value of experience as an analytical unit, it is also necessary to talk about documentation. Everyday experiences are certainly accessible but they are also fleeting, and are often of most use later, after the experience has passed. A major concern is how these experiences can be recorded in a systematic fashion so that they may be reviewed and reexamined at a later date.

Documentation of experience presents a formidable challenge (Shanks 1992). A primary concern lies in the understanding that perception is readily influenced by the medium through which a person interacts with a subject (Benjamin 1973). This influence is illustrated in a discussion of the shifting perspective seen in 17th-century Dutch art. Alpers (1983) reveals that early in the century, paintings typically employed a windowpane style viewpoint. Following the invention of the *camera obscura*, which acted like the retina of an eye, artists began to see art as a representation of reality, incorporating an awareness of perspective. Similarly, the evolution of such perceptions of the world can be seen in conjunction with the invention of other representational technologies as well, such as film/video, the internet,

virtual reality, and beyond. The writing and imaging methods we employ thus determine the information we are presenting, as well as the perception thereof (see formative work in McLuhan 1964, but also Hamilton 2000). Multiplicity of media consequently provides the opportunity to present different sets of information which may allow a variety of viewpoints, interpretation, and inquires to be addressed (Latour 1986). And yet, written and printed material has gained supreme credence more so than any other form of information sharing—although in a world of constant technological innovation, change is just around the next corner.

In the meantime, photography remains an essential component in the recording of experience. The camera can be interpreted simply as a sensory prosthesis (Brik 2003), like a second set of eyes. This does not mean, however, that a photograph should be seen as an empirical representation of reality. While some argue that photography presents no real translation of information to the viewer (Lyons 2005), the necessary involvement of the human touch in the creation of a photograph would suggest this is unlikely. Photography is not a transparent window for reality because it is inherently mediated (Russell 2006; Shanks 1997); there is always a caption, whether or not it is stated outright, and as a result some level of bias will always be present (Barthes 2000). This bias need not be a liability if properly acknowledged; it may encourage multiplicity of a photograph and its meanings. It is even possible that the camera can see things that the human eye cannot (Benjamin 1973).

Of particular interest in the documentation of experience is Barthes' dichotomy of *studium* and *punctum* (Barthes 2000). On one side is the *studium,* the obvious content of the photograph, which remains consistent regardless of the viewer and the viewer's context. In contrast is the *punctum*, the thing that stirs the viewer's interest, that which draws the viewer into the photograph. The *punctum* changes every time a photo is viewed; these changes occur in direct relationship to the outside associations that the viewer may have to the *studium* of the photograph. Thus, Barthes suggests that documentation through photography provides an opportunity to concretely record circumstances while at the same time allowing for the multiplicity of experience, extending that experience temporally, in fact, bounded only by the life of the photograph itself. Thus, documentation through photography can be more provocative than textual descriptions, as it allows for the reanalysis of the ever-changing *punctum*.

Photography should not, however, be seen as the ultimate means of documenting experience. With regard to the documentation of non-visual sensory experiences, photography will unsurprisingly fall short; it is not possible to taste a photograph and taste anything other than a photograph (see Witmore 2006). In the largely occularcentric Western world (see Jay 1993), commonly accepted means of representing such sensory data have

not yet been adequately developed, especially in relation to the sharing of archaeological information (Tringham 2005; Tringham et al. forthcoming). Nevertheless, despite some expansion into internet-based information sharing (Shanks 2007), the preferred media for the dissemination of scholarly research remain paper-based and thus visually oriented. As a result of this privileging of visual media, it remains necessary to attempt visual representation of the other senses through either creative use of imaging or through thick description (eg. Geertz 1973), in order to present data in a format available to a geographically diverse audience. Some work has been done in the utilization of smell (eg. Classen 1993; Classen et al. 1994), touch (eg. Cummings 2002; MacGreggor 1999), sound (eg. Lawson et al. 1998; Mills 2005; Rainbird 2002; Watson and Keating 1999), and taste (eg. Stoller 1989), although such efforts are often hindered by the limitations of the media of presentation.

While there are certainly methods of quantifying these other sensory experiences, which are used in a variety of empirical scientific studies, these means tend to not be accessible to the average archaeologist whose research is largely focused elsewhere; olfactometers, used in quantifying scent, are not in the typical archaeologist's toolkit. Instead, I focus on ways of examining experience that do not require special equipment. The exercise suggested below should be something that can be done any day without a great deal of preparation.

A notable absence amongst the approaches to documentation described in this paper is the lack of video recording (eg. Tringham et al. forthcoming; Van Dyke 2006). Video certainly provides an excellent means of representing experience; it allows the integration of audio and visual information, all within a fluid if not seamless format. This medium can be particularly useful in some circumstances. In others, however, the combination of multiple sensory sources can make it difficult to separate out the components of an experience as audio and visual become a conflated audiovisual representation (Howes 2003). In the exercise described in this paper, the goal is to pull apart the experience into its component parts, in which case video adds an unnecessary extra step to the deconstruction process.

It should also be considered, as discussed above, that the use of various media to represent an experience will inherently affect how that experience is personally remembered and even how it is experienced firsthand, life and life seen through a camera lense are in fact different things. Thus, it is always useful to critically consider an experience at least once without any recording equipment—to just experience it like a normal observer. Then it is appropriate to go back and record it for the purpose of eventual analysis.

Thinking Through Experience: The Virtual Pub Project

As demonstrated in the Virtual Pub Project, "thinking through experience" demands that the individual observer think about the components which make up an experience, to stretch the mind in every possible direction and to challenge the senses to take a more active role in the process of observation (Pearson and Shanks 2001); the wall of passivity and preconception cannot be broken down without some effort, though the final result is well worth it. It would seem that the things one unknowingly takes for granted to be inevitable components of an experience are in actuality the most central, deep-down means of defining that experience. To ignore such components would be a great loss.

This exercise of breaking apart the everyday is perhaps best explained through example. To this end, I draw from my own research on an experience which is fairly familiar. Put most simply, I study 19th-century Irish and Irish-American pubs with a focus on their role in the development and maintenance of community. In order to better inform my research, I embarked upon what I call "The Virtual Pub Project", the purpose of which was to look at different aspects of my own lived pub experience to reveal topics deserving of investigation when looking at pubs in historical and archaeological contexts.[1] I wanted simply to open my mind, to become more aware of my assumptions about the pub experience so that they would not overshadow a possibly divergent reality of the past. With this case study I explore the variety of questions that can be generated when we are made conscious of typically unnoticed components of experience. In addition to presenting specific questions, this case study can serve as a useful point of departure for encouraging creative thinking and practice in documenting sensory experiences. I present an early evening in Wickenden Pub, a small local pub established in 1890 in Providence, Rhode Island, USA.

While the following discussion may focus on means of experiencing the Wickenden Pub, there is no suggestion here that these experiences are universal in any way. When they do address a particular attitude toward brightness or sound, for instance, those attitudes reflect those of the author alone. The point of presenting these personal perceptions is to demonstrate the kind of experiences and questions which might be of use to an archaeologist concerned with assessing his or her own preconceptions and perceptions of an experience. This is a thinking exercise, but it is ultimately a personal one with the aim of providing perspective on knowledge acquisition on an individual scale.

Streetscape

One of the first components influencing the Wickenden Pub experience occurs even before entering the building. This is the streetscape, which in this instance draws attention to the fact that standing in a landscape and looking at a map are two very different perspectives. In this example, looking at the map (Figure 1) it is possible to see that there is another pub

Figure 1. Map of Wickenden Street c.1900. Courtesy of The Sanborn Map Company, annotations by the author

Figure 2. View from the front of Wickenden Pub down Wickenden Street toward second pub. Photo by the author

only six buildings down this tightly packed street. However, looking down the street from the sidewalk in front of Wickenden Pub (Figure 2), the building is not visible; not even the sign hanging out front. This raises the question, does the fact that an observer cannot actually see another pub from the front of the Wickenden dissuade a person from perhaps heading down to that pub later in the evening, or the next time he or she goes out for a drink? Might the vista affect where a person is willing to travel? After all, late at night after a few beers in might not seem like the best time to explore the area looking for new pubs, and during the day an observer might not even notice the small pub down the street exists in a bustling daytime city. Does the season impact the awareness of other pubs due to the visually limiting presence of leaves on the trees? Evaluating these two media—maps and photographs—in relation to each other, new sets of questions are created that might not be apparent when viewing the media separately.

Building Architecture and External Appearance

The overall appearance of a space as it is entered is another key aspect of that experience. General appearance can often be what convinces a patron to enter a pub for the first time, certainly in urban settings where the choice of drinking establishment is rather astounding. What draws a person into a pub? (A pub *punctum*?) The window displays? The signs informing patrons what is on tap? The unassuming doorway (Figure 3)? Does the

Figure 3. Wickenden Pub doorway. Photo by the author

fact that the pub is in the basement of a larger residential style building play a factor in the desirability of the pub (Figure 4)? Or does that hurt it?

Interior Space

Perhaps one of the simplest ways of getting at the feel of any space, either inside a building or in the open air, is through the use of panoramic photography. Here I present three different panoramas (Figure 5). Each represents the view from a different vertical position in the pub, standing, seated in a chair, and kneeling on the floor. All photos were taken from the same point in the pub with the tripod set to the appropriate height. Notice that what is seen and experienced in the pub seems to change based upon vertical position. In fact, it appears to be an entirely different place when a patron is seated versus standing. This concept of vantage point is especially important in spaces that are typically engaged from one particular position. Returning to the bathing example: baths in archaeological or historical contexts are typically experienced by a researcher who is standing

Figure 4. Full view of Wickenden Pub building. The Pub occupies only the ground floor of the building. Photo by the author

Figure 5. Panoramic views of Wickenden Pub: standing (*top*), seated in a chair (*middle*), kneeling on the floor (*bottom*). Photos by the author

up while observing, most likely not even inside a tub. Instead it is useful to think of that experience from a lower level, perhaps lounging in the tub while taking notes. Similarly, vantage point is completely different between

adults and children and this should be taken into consideration when examining children's use of a space.

Material Culture and Architectural Arrangement

The importance of material culture and architecture also strongly inform the experience and use of a space. Thus, of particular use is the opportunity provided in this exercise to examine such material culture and architecture contextualized within an active setting, actually in use. One of the benefits of analyzing a personal experience is that every single detail is present. This provides an opportunity to look at the minutiae of material culture or architecture and their usage (Figure 6), which might not be the sort of thing that is preserved through archaeological, architectural or historical remains. This can help in thinking about what aspects of an experience might be unknowingly removed from an interpretation of archaeological materials. Plus, by looking at material culture in lived context, one can more truly appreciate how important that context is. Further, the act of seeing an object in action, being used as it was intended, really

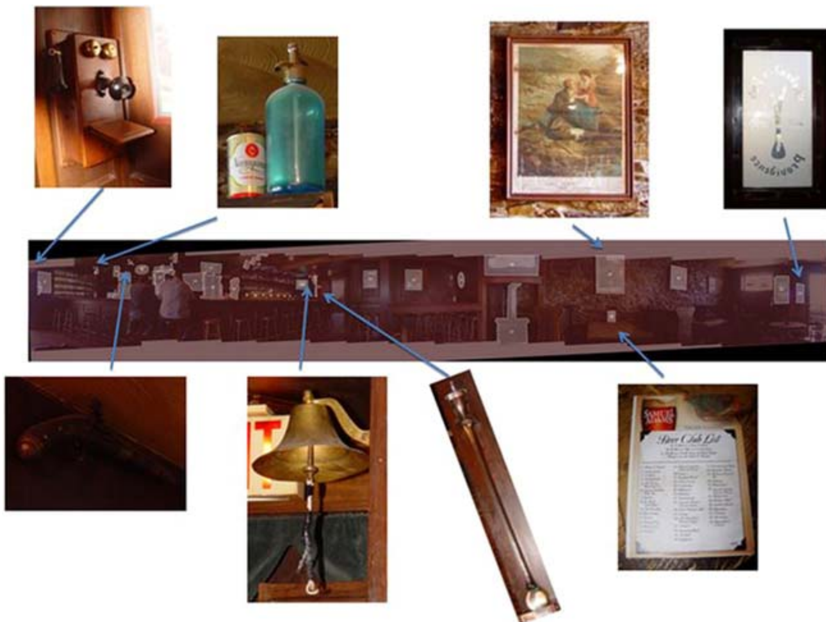

Figure 6. Items of material culture and their contexts within Wickenden Pub. Photos by the author

allows for contemplation of the realities of that use rather than having to struggle in imagining and interpreting use from a static object.

Light Levels

Light has a major influence on how a pub is experienced. Most pub activities would be fairly unpleasant, under, say, the glare of bright fluorescent lights. In this section I provide a means of visually representing the different light levels which can be found in various areas of the Pub, specifically identifying the bright areas which are theoretically more uncomfortable. To accomplish this I took a series of photographs throughout the pub, all with the same aperture and shutter speed (Figure 7). The effect of this is that darker areas appear to be hidden in the shadows and lighter areas appear flooded with light. This seems to be a much more effective way of conveying this information rather than presenting quantitative light readings which are rather inaccessible to non-specialists in visual media. This technique can be useful, as fairly small changes in light levels tend to not be noticed by the viewer as the eyes adjust so quickly, but are likely incorporated unconsciously into one's

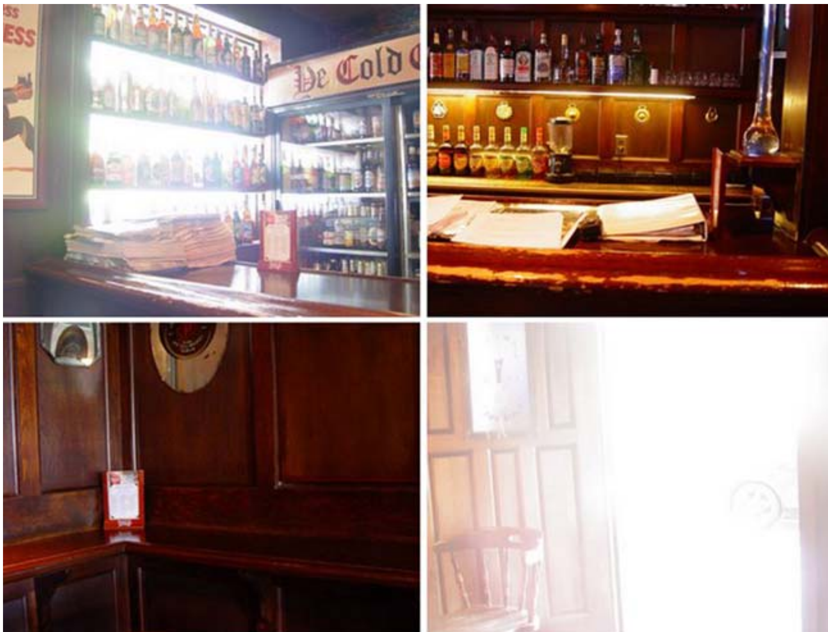

Figure 7. The different light levels in Wickenden Pub (*clockwise from top left*): front window display, rear bar, alcove at rear of pub, front doorway. Photos by the author

perception of the experience. This technique could certainly also be used to examine past spaces if they are well-preserved.

Touch

Much of what I have discussed thus far refers to the visual experience. In reality, we seem to value visual aspects of past experience more than those related to the other senses, possibly because we are occularly biased and tend to forget about the role of the other senses, especially when dealing with archaeological and historical contexts (c.f. Cummings 2002). However, one of the benefits of this process of personally going through an experience is being made aware of all the other senses that are involved in an experience.

The experience of textures within the pub is not necessarily a conscious one, but it adds to the aggregate of the myriad factors which influence the pub experience. While there are documentation issues, I have found that it is fairly possible to represent texture through the use of macro photography (Figure 8). Alternately, another technique for representing texture is through the use of rubbings. Often, while we can acknowledge the texture of an object or surface as being 'rough', it is difficult sometimes to readily quantify or describe how rough that might be compared to other surfaces. Or, conversely, we might not even be aware of how rough that surface is. Rubbings, however, can really make that texture apparent by allowing you to ignore other distracting visual clues. For example, this table (Figure 9)

Figure 8. Macro photograph of wooden pub table. Photo by the author

Figure 9. Rubbing of wooden pub table compared to photograph of same table. Photos by the author

looks like it is fairly smooth aside from some clear graffiti but the rubbing shows that it is quite rough in reality.

Sound

Examining sound as part of this exercise helps one to think about the various acoustic components that make up an experience. By recording separate components it is possible to gather the details of what, in the end, will be a complex audio experience, yet one that might be largely ignored as background ambient noise. The real exercise here is thinking about what those components are and then recording them. The component sounds can then be patched together to get at the total experience. If the complex sound does not seem correct, then the components are not quite right, or something is missing. Is something else going on in the pub that I am not noticing?

The auditory examination process is best explained through example. To create the composite auditory experience of Wickenden Pub, a simple digital audio recorder was used to record the following distinct sounds[2]: bottle cap drop, bottle opening, bottles picked up, glasses picked up, ice scooped into glass, pitcher pour, a sip, ambient crowd chatter, footsteps, and pub music. These individual sounds were then combined to create an initial composite 'whole-pub' sound using simple-to-use audio editing software, Audacity®, an excellent, free, fast, open source, multi-platform program. Some sounds were replicated and added multiple times to the composite to represent simultaneous instances of a sound event (eg. multiple glasses being picked up). It would also be possible in this composite

construction to create softer and louder sounds in order to develop more of a semblance of auditory perspective, though this extra effort was found to be unnecessary in the Virtual Pub Project, thus not a part of the final composite.

Upon listening to the initial composite, there seemed to be an auditory void. The sound was not quite full enough. Some aspect of the auditory experience of the pub was missing, it just did not quite sound like the Wickenden Pub—close, but not quite right. It was then necessary to brainstorm, trying to determine any other important sounds which should have been a part of the composite. Through this process it was discovered that the sound of moving chairs and tables, a surprisingly loud and constant sound in a pub, had been ignored. This sound was then recorded and added to a second, and ultimately final, composite of the 'whole-pub' sound. The final composite sounded rather accurately like the actual Wickenden pub, no longer exhibiting a lack of fullness. This entire process could readily be applied to any auditory experience.

Smell and Taste

Smell and taste are rather difficult to document. The standard means of recording or analyzing these types of data are not very commonplace, affordable, or easy to use. Thus, at present the best way of documenting smell and taste archaeologically is through thick description. Additionally, I have found that if used strategically, photography can be successful in helping to at least record some sensory experiences; especially with relation to food and drink. Photography is particularly useful in aiding personal recall of past sensory experiences. It remains difficult to share this experience with others, but may nevertheless be useful in aiding the researcher, especially as he or she becomes more removed from the moment. In many cases, however, creative thick descriptions and references back to other familiar experiences may evoke these memories quite successfully (eg. a musty damp basement scent mixed with the smell of damp earth that has not been exposed to light or air movement for a while like when you lift a tarp that has been sitting on the damp ground for a long time).

Conclusion

While there are certainly several additional components of the Wickenden Pub experience, I hope those that I present here provide a clearer view how such an experience might be broken down so that it can be examined more fully. Any experience in daily life can be pulled apart in such a fash-

ion. Think about that experience from any angle imaginable. Document it in any way possible. And ask questions—a lot of questions. All that remains then, is to bring those thoughts and queries back to the archaeological investigation at hand.

As archaeologists, we tend to shy away from discussions of experience, perhaps because it is so difficult to infer, and there is some merit to this argument. Yet, just as we experience our own lives, so too did individuals in past cultures. This aspect of life should not be ignored simply because it demands the use of multimedia components, some of which may be unfamiliar to the archaeologist's traditional toolkit; nor should it be ignored because it is a topic that is challenging to interpret archaeologically. Rather, through discussion and experimentation we should embrace any opportunity to expand our scholarly vistas. It is through increasing the integration of new and old media technologies and methods of documentation into archaeological practice, in looking toward the future, that we can simultaneously clear a path to an open past.

Further, by exploring the development of knowledge on the small scale of the individual archaeologist, it is possible to take control of the production of knowledge within a greater scholarly world. As our lives are influenced by continually changing theoretical, political, social, and physical environments, an awareness of this impact on interpretations of the past contextualizes archaeological practice in a manner which can ensure that the research being conducted today is just as useful to the archaeologists of tomorrow.

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Notes

1. The physical restrictions of printed journal format greatly limits the information presented herein. In order to appreciate the utility and variety of high resolution and panoramic photography as well as audio recordings other fora may be more appropriate. To that end, please visit the Virtual Pub Project online at http://proteus.brown.edu/charest/2588. in all its dynamic, multimedia glory.
2. These sounds are available at the Virtual Pub Project website at http://proteus.brown.edu/charest/2588

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