

# 9

## OUT OF THE DAY, TIME AND LIFE

### Phenomenology and cavescapes

*Hein B. Bjerck*

Into the underland we have long placed that which we fear and wish to lose,  
and that which we love and wish to save

*(Macfarlane 2019, p. 8)*

#### **Affects of cavescapes – an introduction**

It is a paradox; perhaps our confidence in a scientific approach sometimes make us miss the point. Archaeologists cherish caves as a place for fortunate discoveries – they are containers of well-preserved things from the deep past; the scarceness of weathering and microorganisms in caves are a good thing. The result is that caves may produce unexpected and wonderful things, fragile paintings that still retain their colours, delicate artefacts, faunal remains that may be classified, negative imprints of human hands, arrangements of things, burials, and even human bare-foot imprints and finger marks. We bring sharp instruments to retrieve objects and document contexts, electrical torches, lasers to measure distances, sensors to explore sounds and temperature – still, perhaps the essence of the situation escapes us.

Very likely, the past people that ventured into the dark spaces saw it differently. They did not enter caves to retrieve well-preserved things – they probably were drawn to a wider range of what we may label cave affects – they probably came to visit the cave itself. At best, they came with flickering torches, and had little other instruments to record what was in here, except their own bodily sensing organs. They lacked the instruments that could separate soundscapes from fragrances, and temperatures from visions – but had to take it all-in at the same instant. The electric light and specialized recording facilities we bring along to explore the darkened enclosures may very well counteract our ability to sense what was at centre for

past people's reasons to visit the cave. In this chapter, I will explore how caves as landscapes are sensed by human visitors (Clottes 2003) – the affects of *cavescapes*:

Emphasizing involuntary material memory and the significance of experience also connects to (...) the *affective aspects of material encounters*. The preferred academic conception is that things, monuments, and places are interpreted – in other words, made sense of rather than sensed – whereby significance is rendered humanly inscribed rather than released from encounters with things themselves.

(Olsen and Pétursdóttir n.d.)

My fascination of caves emerged by coincidence back in 1992. My geologist college Jacob Møller had invited me to a cave in the outer parts of the Lofoten islands in North Norway. In the ancient beach sediment in the floor of the cave named 'Helvete' (Hell) he had collected shell fragments that was dated to 33.000 BP, i.e., from an interstadial during the last Ice Age (Møller et al. 1992). This implied that the cave had been open to 'whatever' that might have happened since then. In theory, the cave could host remains from Neanderthals as well as Hipsters, and all that was between. Now, we intended to check out things in more detail, and aimed at test pits in the gravel floor of the inner part of the cave. Remembering a recent discovery of paintings in a nearby cave (Hauglid et al. 1991), I entered the cave with one eye on the floor – the other on the walls. Very soon after arrival, my flashlight revealed faint red lines on the wall – the same stick-men as was found in a few other caves. The discovery was like a shooting star, sudden, unexpected and undeserved, that immediately turned into addiction, an urge to find more. For years I used every opportunity to check out caves. In the next few years, my archaeologist colleague Martinus Hauglid and I discovered three more caves with paintings – and also visited many other caves, with or without paintings (Bjerck 1995, 2012). The anticipation of looking into the dark from the mouth of a new unexplored cave, feeling the cave's timeless chill to your face, the mouldy scent of a possible successful finding – it was as exciting as exploring can be.

In my study of earlier publications on cave paintings discoveries in Norway since the first case was reported in 1913, I was startled to find that the affective aspects of caves were hardly mentioned prior to the careful hints in the works of Johansen (1988) and Hesjedal (1994). The sequence of papers that presented and discussed new findings was clearly biased towards what was the current research focus at the time of publication. Each paper hosts the hallmarks of popular research in their time of publication, and in sum they reveal interesting trends in archaeological research history. Normally, the documentation of the caves is sketchy, the profile of floor and roof, and a plan drawing with lines where floor meets walls, its basic measurements. The affects of caves are for the most part reduced to the drop line, the 'beginning' of the cave as out of the rain (Bjerck 1995; 2012).

Anybody that has visited caves knows that there are more than this. But most 'other things' are soft data that are perceptible but positions are intangible, they are hard to document with pencil lines on millimetre paper, they are impossible

to bag – as this ‘otherness’ is basically found in your own experience from being here – things that had no space in the trustworthy format of a traditional, decent archaeological report. Within the positivist theoretical regime that many of us come from, we were plainly warned about this – our own references to being-in-the-world was straightforwardly ‘harmful’ to our ability to an ‘uncontaminated’ understanding of the past, the present was an unescapable burden that we could not be relieved of. Thus, perhaps the most important phenomena that caves offered to past human visitors escaped any further inspection. Ironically, all archaeologists that have worked in darkness of caves have experienced to fumble around to retrieve pencil, eraser and folding rule – but it seems that none of them actually saw the relevance of the darkness itself (Bjerck 2012).

In Bjørnar Olsen’s words ‘Phenomenology is (...) concerned with the world as it manifests itself to those who take part in it’ (Olsen 2010, p. 66). He proceeds to point out that

the phenomenological approach to human perception imply two important insights:

- Our relatedness to the world. We are entangled beings fundamentally involved in networks of human and nonhuman beings
- We relate to the world not (only) as thinking subjects but also as bodily objects – our being in the world.

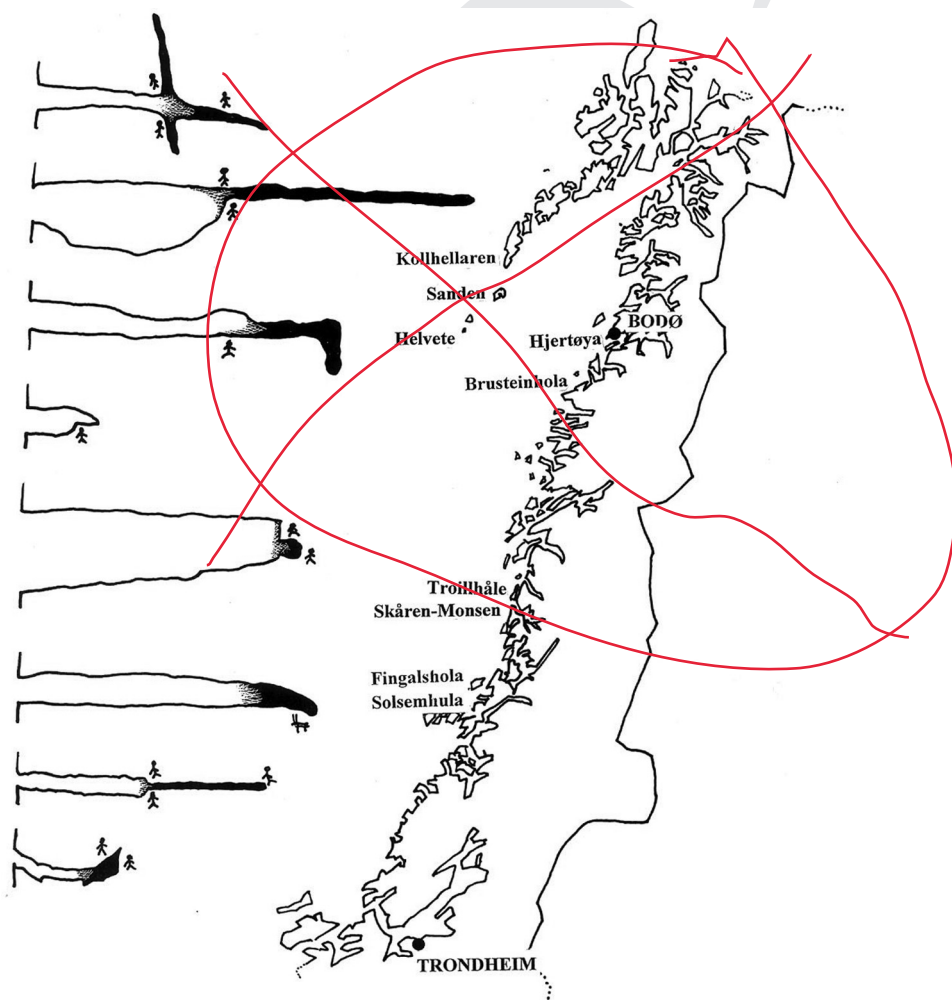
(*ibid*)

In a ‘presentism’ perspective (e.g. Olivier 2004; 2011), the same repertoire of sensible cave properties that the caves offered people in the past, are also *here and now*, and always ready to be sensed and explored. Evidently, some 2–3000 years ago, past peoples entered a set of caves, and inscribed paintings on the walls, paintings that for the most part depict human beings. One might assume their reasons for entering the caves and what they did in here were related to what they sensed in cavescape. Past peoples, as they were humans like us, encountered the same cave affects that are available for humans today.

Thus, the meeting points between cave properties and the things the cave painters added to cavescape, embrace memories of events that took place here, events that hold strong relations to how caves were sensed and understood. What we may not know, are how experiences from the caves mixed in with the cave painters’ worldview and past peoples’ relatedness to the world (Jackson 1986). The ontological depths of past phenomenological relations have probably evaporated for good. Nonetheless, and well aware of the critical stances (e.g. Brück 2005; Hamilton et al. 2006), I share Tilley’s (1994; 2004) basic phenomenological assumption that we and the peoples of the past share ‘carnal bodies’, size, shape, and sensory organs – that we engage with the same physical world and the same repertoire of phenomena – and that these factors may serve as ‘guidelines’ in the understanding of past actions, praxis and beliefs.

Nevertheless, I think it is a worthwhile endeavour to bring you along on a tour to the affective aspects from my embodied encounters of caves, that eventually will end up in exploring the placements of cavescape paintings. In Robert Macfarlane's words, these meeting points are '*thin places* ... where borders between worlds or epochs feel at their most fragile' (2019, p. 270, italics added).

Actually, in line with a presentism perspective, 'thin places' may be studied as part of the contemporary, just as much as exploring an abandoned post-war mining town or derelict industrial areas. 'There is no archaeology of the twenty-first century



**FIGURE 9.1** The Norwegian cave paintings are situated in a c. 500 km long coastal area in Northern Norway. To the left, a schematic sketch of caves, the darkness within, and proximate location of paintings.

Map: Hein B. Bjerck

but only an archaeology of the twenty-first and all its pasts, mixed and entangled' (González-Ruibal 2008, p. 262).

## Cavescapes and paintings

Basic information on the findings is needed before exploring cavescape affects. Paintings are documented in 12 caves, with a total of less than *c.* 150 individual figures (Figure 9.1) (Bjerck 2012; Norsted 2013). They are all found in big caves exposed to open sea, costal caves produced by marine erosion during the Pleistocene Ice Ages (Møller 1985; Møller et al. 1992). Most caves are situated near the marine limit at raised shorelines and are accordingly located in various elevations, in line with differences in isostatic uplift. The majority are deep, proper caves that reach into dark chambers, up to 200 meters deep. From floor to ceiling there may be as much as 20–50 meters, and the formations may be seen from great distance (Figure 9.2). In their back parts, signs of wave erosion are still evident – slick walls and round beach cobbles/gravel cover the floor. After the freezing ocean waves, gravity took over: in and around cave mouths frequent rock falls added up to a wall of talus scree that block the cave entrance. In some cases, ropes or ladders are needed to overcome huge rock downfalls. Probably, numerous caves are presently totally sealed off by scree formations.

The context of cave paintings may indicate a shared ritual tradition. This is also reflected in the very paintings, that are remarkably similar in shape, colour and size. The painted rock art found in open rock faces include a far wider range of motifs and time (Gjessing 1936; Slinning 2005; Andreassen 2008; Helberg 2016). Most cave paintings are *en face* 'stick men' around 25–40 cm tall: a round head, a body line, arms and legs splayed to the sides (Figures 9.3, 9.4). 'Red dancers' could very well be a better term, which certainly is closer to how the paintings are sensed:

Their red is rough at its edges, fading back into the rock that made it, blurred by water and condensation, and all of these circumstances – the blur, the low light, my exhaustion, my blinks – are what give the figures their life, make them shift shapes on this volatile canvas in which shadow and water and rock and fatigue are all artists together, and for once the old notion of ghosts seem new and true in this space. These figures are *ghosts* all dancing together, and I am a ghost too, and there is a conviviality to them, to *us*, to the thousands of years for which they have been dancing here together.

(Macfarlane 2019, p. 278)

In spite of obvious similarities, details demonstrate that the uniformity is more prominent within caves than between panels in different caves (size, proportions, how arms/legs are splayed), suggesting local variations within a wider, communal tradition (Bjerck 2012). Nonetheless, there are exceptions from the anthropomorph motifs – like the big cross in the Solsem cave (Petersen 1914). A long horizontal line below the panel is reported from Helvete in Lofoten (Norsted 2006, pp. 32–3),



**FIGURE 9.2** The Sanden caves are found in the northwest coast of Værøy in Lofoten, wide-open to the marine erosion that excavated the coastal caves during the Pleistocene Ice Ages. Two of them are showing in the cliff by the fishing boat.

The cave with paintings is nearly sealed off by the rock fall fan to the left of the open caves. Behind the scree, a big chamber leads to a narrow corridor that extend into the deep dark. The red 'stick men' is painted in the innermost part of the dusk, outer chamber, on both sides of the mouth of the pitch black corridor (Figure 9.1). According to a local myth, a dog that once disappeared in the deep part of the cave resurfaced at the other side of the mountain.

Photo: Hein B. Bjerck



**FIGURE 9.3** 'Red dancers', a section of the painted panel in 'Kollhellarn', Moskenes.

Drawing: Hein B. Bjerck

where there also is a considerable larger human figure with open hands, legs with bent knees, and feet with soles. Some caves have a few crosses and undefinable lines (Johansen 1988). The Skåren-Monsen cave is the only one without human figures – the long-horned animal here is unique among cave paintings (Sognnes 1983). About 20 other large coastal caves in the region (there are many) have been searched with no result (Bjerck 2012).

Cultural deposits are frequent in rock shelters – but caves are rarely used for habitation. Nevertheless, a Bronze Age cultural layer was excavated in the Solsem cave, that contained a few bone artefacts, shells, and c. 2000 animal bones (fish, birds, seal, goat/sheep, ox, horse), and some human bones, datings from range from c. 1700 to 200 cal BC (Petersen 1914; Sognnes 1983, 2009). The location of the cultural layer was in the near-dark part of the cave, which in addition to the absence of lithic waste indicate non-residential activity. In Helvete, there were bones from a big gray seal (*Halichoerus gryphus*) in the innermost part of the cave; samples demonstrate cut marks from butchering. The remains seem to represent a complete animal – big bones, skull fragments, teeth, claws from flippers, and date to 1600–1400 cal BC (Bjerck 1995, 2012). The closest associated artefacts to the images are



**FIGURE 9.4** Human figure painted on the calcite crust in the roof of 'Brusteinshola', arms and legs splayed, drenched by condensed water.

Photo: Hein B.Bjerck

the ‘palette slabs’ and lumps of pigment that Marstrander (1965, p. 159) reported from the floor below the panels in the innermost Finngal’s cave. Unfortunately, these artefacts are not found today (Norsted 2008). Until a direct dating of the very painting is presented (which seems possible), I guess the exact age of the tradition will be unclear.

### Sensing cavescapes

From a distance, most caves stick out as unfamiliar formations – big openings in the normal world of mountains and gigantic, steep rock faces leaning towards the forces of open sea. On coming closer, the breath-taking dimensions evoke a feeling of being small and inferior, you are reminded of the many things that are bigger than a human in the world. Very often a fissure, a fault or a bedrock vein may be spotted in the rock directly above the opening. To the modern human, a weakness that permitted frost and the abiding pounding from icy ocean waves to excavate ever deeper, accelerating as the cave itself funnelled the forces. To others that saw the world differently, fissures and bedrock alterations perhaps revealed why this door opened precisely here ...

### *... losing colours and light*

Standing on the huge wall of rock falls that normally is in cave mouths, you may look down and into the eerie cavescape. Sometimes, the outward wall side may be covered with soil and vegetation, on the inside the guts of the formation is revealed; open scree and gigantic rock falls, dusted and unstable. The mouth of the cave is surprisingly green with lush ferns, wide-bladed grass and wet moss. Inside there is a dim interplay of hues, with alternating stripes of rock and mineral precipitates – white, yellow, red, brown, black, and grey. As you enter the proper cave, you very soon lose the light. Further in, there are only the wet and smooth rock surfaces that shine faintly. The full ‘effect’ of the cave is not experienced before you have reached the point where the light fades and shifts to darkness. You have moved from broad daylight to muted reflections from lustreless rock walls.

The last you will see is that colours vanish, except for a patchy cover of green lichen, nothing grows, nothing moves. You are as blind were it not for the light you brought with you (Figure 9.5). Even with a reasonable flashlight, you need to take extra care as you move around – even more if the light you brought was a flickering, flaming torch, as most past visitors had to manage by.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps you need to climb huge rocks that have fallen from the roof. Do not trust the shadows in-between, you never know if there is five centimetres or two meters down.

### *... there are no ending*

You may think that you are surrounded by surfaces of solid rock. If you look closer, you can see that this is not true. There is no definite ending, only an entanglement





**FIGURE 9.5** Jacob Møller and my son Trygve during a break in ‘Helvete’. The paintings are found in the wave abraded wall to the left, in the outer part of the darkened cave.

Photo: Hein B. Bjerck

of solid rock and deep shadows. In the roof, where your little light can barely reach there are just darkness, in the floor there are openings below large rocks everywhere. Cracks and openings in walls and floor – they do not end, they just bend. Not in long, you realize that the cave is not a confined space – there are passages beyond in so many places. The sensation of being diminutive on entering is suddenly revolved, now size is your problem. Your over-sized human body are unable to pass any further. Even if you could persuade someone smaller to go deeper, you know that this creature too, due to its bodily size soon would be stopped. You may think that sooner or later the cave will end, completely enclosed by faces of solid rock. More likely, a smaller body would discover even more openings that could not be entered, more forking cracks and fissures, and instead of getting closer to the end of the cave – you would expand the mystery. The ending of the cave is nowhere to

be seen, nowhere to be felt. How do you know where the cave ends? How do you know that there *is* an ending?

### **... *the evil of narrow spaces***

If you venture deeper through the narrow parts in your search for the cave's end, in the limits of how far the size of your body permits you to pass, you may experience a sudden, paralyzing anxiety. In our time, we have learned this phenomenon by the name 'claustrophobia'. Each time (many) I have encountered claustrophobia it strikes very suddenly, each time I am likewise unprepared. It is very unpleasant. As you crawl, and see that you cannot advance any longer, and it is impossible to turn around, you have to crawl backwards. When you find yourself in a light squeeze between the floor and the rock roof, and you feel the weight of the many hundred meters of rock above you. One time, I was leading a group of people through a narrow passage. Right around the next bend, I realized that it was the end of the cave for my bodily measurements. The rest of the party blocked my retreat in the narrow passage. Each time, I know that I will survive, that I will be back in the open in due time. Nevertheless, this panicky feeling always strikes me hard.

In my normal being-in-the-world, I am told that claustrophobia is something coming from within me, a panicky feeling triggered by narrow spaces, a notion of being trapped, and I believe this is true. But how can I know for sure? Each time I have experienced claustrophobia this scary feeling could just as well have been from encountering some evil, invisible force that percolate from the dark and narrow, something that resides or is emitted by the cave, a thing that grabs me, a warning that this is far enough. How can I know the difference? I acknowledge that this uncanny feeling is not universal. Some people are not prone to claustrophobia, and you may lose this feeling by training. Nevertheless, I am confident that I am not alone in the world through the times to have bumped into this scary experience. The traditional Norwegian beliefs that gruesome (but stupid) trolls resides inside mountains, and the possibility of being 'bergtatt', literally locked into the rock in the home of a troll, has to come from somewhere.

### **... *chill, sounds and scents***

Closer to the mouth of the cave, you may hear faint sounds from the outside, birds, the ocean surfs, that the cave transform by adding reverb and echo, sounds that have lost their direction. Approximately where you enter the dark, there are simply no other sounds apart for your own, the rattle from pebbles and stone as you move. If you stop, there is your breath, and a steady switch you do not hear very often. The sound of silence, the sound of your own heart beats doing something to your eardrums. A rhythmic swish from the blood pumping through your inner ear. Perhaps there is the sound from a falling drop of water. Sometimes there is a long wait until the next one. Long enough for you to start wondering ... was it really a falling drop of water you heard?

The cave emits a steady odour that you may recognize from a fridge that has not been opened for a long time, or perhaps the cellar of an old house. But unlike the normal world, where you constantly sense whiffs of different smells with changing intensities as you move about, the cave offers no olfactory variation, just this steady, musty odour. Soon, the lack of variation makes your olfaction dormant. All in all, in a way, you are deprived of most senses that make you engage with the normal world.

By now, you would surely notice the chill. If the climb to the cave made you sweat, the wet cold shirt would stick to your back. Your slow movements in here are not sufficient to maintain the normal body heat, not in long you start to get cold. Cold, the temperature of what is below, things left by life – along with everything else in here, it adds up on you.

### ***... nothingness and the tentacle of fear***

It is normal practice among cave travellers in our time: To sit down, be totally quiet, and put out the light. This weird feeling of nothingness, like weightless floating in space. You may feel like very big, or perhaps tiny – there is no scale in the dark. Like being on the outside of everything, or perhaps in the very middle of it. Sometimes, when I have done this in solitude, this exercise is accompanied with a sneaking feeling of insecurity. Some kind of uncertainty, slightly scary – even if I know that I am in a safe place, there is this growing anxiety in the depths of my disrupted senses. You may feel an urge to light your torch. Unfortunately, it does not help much – as the light reveals the many dark spaces between the rock surfaces to the left, right, above and below. And even worse, wherever you turn the beam of light, there is the big darkness right behind you. How can you know for sure what darkness is and what resides there? Soon after, the feeling that the light you just lit to counteract anxiety made you very visible, vulnerable, a highlighted eye-catcher for all nameless beings that surround you. Light, or no light – once you are touched by the gentle tentacle of fear, safety is hard to reclaim.

### ***... beyond time***

All in all, it is the absence of everything that hits you – the lack of movement, colours, scents, and noise which we are used to in the life and day outside. The cave is monotonous, silent, unmoving and evasive, cold and unseen – the very opposite of the living world. There is no day, no winter, no summer, and nothing that grows. The cave extends beyond life, and beyond time.

In our normal being-in-the-world we experience ‘time’ in movements and changes. The sun moves across the sky during the day, leaving the scene for the night as soon as it sinks below the horizon, leaving the sky to the slow movement of stars and moon, the sequence of seasons. In some caves, sometimes, the sun may shine directly into the cave mouth, a brief moment of light and movement, that



**FIGURE 9.6** Leaning against the cold wall in ‘Helvete’ is a young bird, still in its pose of a living creature. Life has left it, but it is still sitting there. How long has it sat there? It is not easy to tell, because time does not seem to exist here in the conspicuous absence of life.

Photo: Hein B. Bjerck

still rarely reach to the inner part of the cave; nothingness prevails in spite of brief moments of life.

Caves hold very few visible signs of ‘time’. Weather is absent. Storms, snow, rain, cold, warm – all these familiar phenomena seem indifferent to caves. Living things move around or grow – dead things decay and vanish. Nothing of this is in cave. On the floor there are remains of dead animals and birds, cadavers with hair and feathers, but without swarms of flies or crawling maggots. Leaning against the cold wall is a young bird, with its upward pointing beak optimistically open, still in its pose of a living creature, in contrast to its matt black eyes without the brightness of life (Figure 9.6). Life has left it, but it is still sitting there. How long has it sat there? It is not easy to tell, because time does not seem to exist here in the conspicuous absence of life. What is present is a kind of baseline for being, including what is beyond life, before and after. As archaeologists, we are perhaps blinded by the prospects of exceptional condition for preservation. For past people, perhaps the lack of decay in here was just another sign of a space outside life and time.

In the deepest part of ‘Helvete’, scattered around a large rock, there was collection of fresh-looking bones from a grey seal, cut marks proved that it was put here by humans. A radiocarbon date reveal that it has been here for 3600 years. That is, 120 generations have had the opportunity to see this thing from the past in their present, the rate of decay so slow that everyone have seen the remains just as they saw it on their last visit.



**FIGURE 9.7** View from the mouth of 'Helvete'.

Perhaps the most profound embodied cave experience is when you re-enter the life and light outside the cave: your more or less dormant senses from the time you spent in lifeless silence below, are suddenly bombarded with movement, sounds, scents and colours; the familiar world, now estranged.

Photo: Hein B. Bjerck

### *... returning to the day*

However, you may still have the greatest surprise from being-in-the-cave in reserve. Perhaps the most profound embodied experience is when you re-enter life and light outside the cave: your more or less dormant senses from the time you spent in lifeless silence below, are suddenly bombarded (Figure 9.7).

It is a strange feeling to be surprised by all familiar things, to encounter your own world with amplified alertness, almost as coming to a new world. Or perhaps a sense of yourself as being new to the world. The affect of a warm whiff of wind, the blue sky above you, the moving clouds. The sudden attention to sound of lazy bumble bees and busy birds, the scent of the sea and bird excrements, grass and flowers in bright red and yellow, the abundance of life, movement and colour. Straws that nod in the wind, the blinking reflections of sunlight from the ever-moving surface of deep blue sea – the living everyday things we always see, but hardly notice.

## **Discussion and conclusions: cavespaces and the Underworld**

Sensing cavespaces – how can this be relevant for understanding past people's rationale for visiting here and add painted human figures to darkened rock faces? Are not the unlimited possibilities for how *affects of cavespaces* were influenced by past

people's personal experience and worldview just too farfetched, too mingled and folded to be handled in the archaeological discourse? Perhaps this is the problem – that we are better off by analyzing cave paintings as *human beings in the world* than scholarly archaeologists, to have faith in things that affect us as human rather than scientists.

Leaving out details in the paintings – the fact that more than 90% of the figures are anthropomorphic must be an imperative observation. The similarity in context, style and size indicate a common tradition. In addition, there may be clues in the *placement of paintings* in these caves. A rough overview of cave plan drawings reveal that paintings are placed differently (Figure 9.1). In a strict, objective sense there seem to be no order. Paintings tend to be grouped – but single figures are also found. Distances from panels to cave mouths and deep 'ends' vary. In some caves, paintings are found by distinct narrowings within. Others have paintings in their dark depths. There are paintings in large chambers where they could be displayed to many – as well as in narrow chambers that limited viewing. Several caves are painted in the twilight zone between light and dark. The single sure fact is that no caves have paintings close to their mouths.

However, and this is my main point, if paintings are included in *how caves are sensed*, and not tri-dimensionally measured, there is perhaps a more distinguishable pattern. Paintings may reveal the importance of borders; as paintings are placed near positions where a human being would sense that he or she is departing from the human world, and sense the border of entering something else, a world outside the day, beyond weather and life, movement and time. These borders may be conceived differently – where the light fades, by narrow passages, in places where your body restrains further movement, or where claustrophobia hits you. Thus, there may be a structure in what appears unstructured. A panel in Brusteinhola in Gildeskål is particularly interesting (Bjerck 2012, p. 53). Here, the painters seem to have erected a flat rock to paint three human figures adjacent to a wide horizontal fissure that delimit any further human reach. As the 'canvas' of the panel seems artificial, it is reason to believe that this exact spot, evidently not an ending, but the outer limit for humans, was imperative.

This is perhaps where phenomenology departs from traditional archaeology. You may measure exact positions, if openings face north or south, distances between caves, calculate means and average values in the relations of paintings, walls, roofs, floors, opening and end – and yet never get closer to understanding. To change the scale from meters to millimetres will not bring you further. You can add complex lux-values, sound recordings measured in hertz with decimals, document relative humidity values, and yet nothing will come out as clear patterns in diagrams and tables. The way towards knowledge is not found in minute details prehistoric people had no capacities to know.

Why? It is because the answer is too complex, and at the same time too simple. The human body is a fine tuned sensory instrument that constantly records, compare and convey, probably without even knowing. The human mind mingles all this with experiences and worldviews embedded in the depth of their cognitive

systems – that aggregate in sentiments. The human body do not separate sounds from vision in different tables, do not analyze fragrances separate from temperatures, and do not make calculations where answers have decimals. On the contrary, all this is intermingled in the same instant, and condensed in a notion that tells you when things are right.

With respect to the engagement with caves, cave painters probably experienced and ascribed affective meaning to the overall sense of caves as opposites to the human world; that caves lack colours, sounds, smells, movement, life and time. Very likely, visitors would have sensed the elusive termination of chambers and passages, which evokes a feeling that there is more – which is beyond the reach of humans.

In addition to fascination, I believe that engaging with caves induce a certain level of apprehension on a scale ranging from uneasiness to fear. The loss of sensory control in here – when eyes fail to provide the information you need to move and detect things (and threats) that surround you, ears failing to detect the directions and provenience of sounds, not being able to see what is making sounds, and your nose filled is with an all-encompassing smell of chilled decay – death, nothingness and eternity. The phenomenon ‘claustrophobia’ – the strange and paralyzing feeling triggered by narrow spaces, simultaneously coming from within and outside – may also have evoked a feeling of being overpowered and out of place. The level of uneasiness may vary – but still, enough people are likely to have experienced anxiety to define and mediate the phenomenon.

Finally, there is the dichotomy between the caves’ realm of absence and the reinforced awareness of all ‘normal’ things in the world on returning from caves, a profound wakefulness of life, a joyful reunion with movements and soundscape, colours and scents – familiar and abnormal simultaneously. I daresay that it is an overall joyful sensation, a sense of coming back, a sense of belonging.

Very likely, some of these facts have been engaged in the much wider array of rationales that constructed the reasons for painting red ‘stick men’ in Norwegian caves. With or without paintings, and far beyond Bronze Age North Norway in time and space, caves may very well have been imperative in constructing the widespread notion of *axis mundi* and the three-tier universe that are found in many cosmologies around the world (e.g., Anisimov 1963). The very tangible sensuous world of caves, the affects that caves offer to humans, are a places one may see for oneself. Step by step the living world vanishes before your eyes to be replaced by nothingness – a dead world that may actually be seen and sensed by the living, spaces that also witness a continuum to realms beyond humans.

Caves appear in a myriad of shapes, sizes, hardships in how to enter them, if they face north or south. Nevertheless, all these variation melts into one when you reach the cave proper – details conger in a kind of sensed sameness. Thus, caves are more than individual, confined holes in the surface. In fact, as you encounter the very same wherever or whenever you enter these cracks in the human world. Consequently, caves are material witnesses that nourish a belief of a world-encompassing and eternal Underworld through the times.

The phenomenological conclusion is that the affects of cavescaples probably are imperative for the widespread notion of an underworld. The unreachable underneath is a realm tilted towards fear and evil – the opposite of the likewise inaccessible Heaven above us, the home of harmony, hope and the noble.

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## Note

1. A flaming torch is said to emit about 10 watts / 1850 kelvin of light, quite less than our electrical torches (Pettitt 2016, p. 15).

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