

An Attempt at Explaining Exploration to the Public

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In the absence of the living, there still exists a life. Every abandonment has a heartbeat, a pulse that makes it both unique and alive. Finding that rhythm is one of the purest things I've experienced, but explaining why I'd want to can be something else entirely.

When I tell someone that I'm involved in Urban Exploration, I get a wide range of responses. It's everything from "Isn't that dangerous?" to "That's illegal!" to "Do you ever see ghosts?" to, mainly, "Why?". Although Urban Exploration has been getting a lot of press lately, nothing that I've read really addresses why anyone would want to spend their spare time running around abandoned buildings. This is my attempt, for everyone who was ever curious to know, at explaining why.

Part of it is in the way an abandonment sounds. It's the sound of what it means to be forgotten. A leaking roof is a drumbeat, not a problem. The wind through a broken window is a song, not a repair waiting to happen. There are no worries about the comforts of inhabiting an abandonment. The heat is free to escape, The rain can do as it pleases, and no one is speaking here. You won't hear the normal noises of a structure being inhabited by it's users. There are no footsteps but your own when you are inside. It's a particular kind of quiet existing that you can only really feel inside an abandonment. If you sit still for any length of time, you become a part of the quiet. You can hear both the rain and your heartbeat; Both the wind and your breath. It's a kind of quiet I've never found anywhere else.

Part of it is in the decay. It's watching a structure being reclaimed by nature. On first glance, it's no more than the way a tree will sometimes begin to grow in a crack in the floor. It's grass on a carpet, or flowers in empty bathtubs. Look closer, however, and you'll see roots destroying floorboards, vines peeling away paint, rainwater softening walls and whole ecosystems of moss merging with rugs. It's a razing so different than man's violent tearings down. If you visit a place often enough, the slow motion collapse of a site becomes an art form to be watched. To see first hand the way a floor will cave in over a period of six months or a year gives you an emotional attachment to it's demise. It's a similar feeling I'd imagine one would have if they built the structure, or spent any amount of time there during its height. Some people see a place born into usefulness. Explorers see it leave the world of man. Stay a while, and you'll become aware of the floor beneath your feet in a way you've never felt. No longer can you rely on it's safety. There is no one here to make it safe. Every footstep you take is as a visitor to a thing no longer considered necessary. Here, you become aware of the motion of your body within a space. How your weight and actions effect your surroundings. Here, you can begin to know the intentions behind your own movement.

Part of it is in the smell. Here, the way nature mixes with man-made substances is the natural state of things. Wet concrete, growing things, plaster dust and stale air make every abandonment unfamiliar. It's not the smell of a place for humans. There is no smell of cleansers here. No one comes to make sure the place is well aired. Strangely, as an explorer, after a time, you begin to enjoy it. It gains the representation of getting away from the world on a terrible day. It becomes a symbol of the moment that you know, at least for a while, no one will find you; that you are as forgotten as the place itself. It could be, after a while, that the smell of abandonment becomes the trigger for some of your best memories. It could be the smell of being alone.

Part of it is in the things you find. Every object tells you a story. Even the plainest things, -sheets of paper, a forgotten sweater, piles of keys- Make you question what happened here. Every object that you touch becomes a foreign thing. You may as well have never seen it before, because you don't know why it was used. You can

only make your best guess. You can easily spend hours in an abandonment, sitting perfectly still, reading old records by the light of a flashlight. You can be completely absorbed in this world you were never a part of. Gaining so personal an insight on the life of a site can make your own problems seem very far away. It's like reading someone's diary; Everything you see doesn't belong to you.

Consider for a moment the fact that the world is overwhelming. Noise, sounds, smells, they all overlap until nothing is pure. They are in a state of constant change. Your own things overwhelm you with their price tags. Every place is tread upon, every place is owned. To find a place to be alone, besides your own home, is nearly impossible; And still, even at home, there is a television blaring, a telephone ringing, bills to pay, laundry to do. Even at home, you are distracted by the things that make us human.

Consider, then, your state of mind in an abandonment. With your awareness of your surroundings heightened until you are one with them, you begin to experience everything differently. It's then that an abandonment can begin to have a voice, and speak to you. Here is where the exploration begins.

It's rare to do anything anymore with nothing but the purest intentions to experience and learn. Exploration, comparable to love, is being intrigued by another to the point where all you want is for them to tell you everything. It seems every spoken word is monumental; Severe in its inflections, no matter how plain the intention. You can fall in love with a ruin. I've done it, so I know it's possible. It begins with hearing the rhythm of a place, and progresses to melting into it, so you and it are one. It's the feeling of solving a mystery, or letting something be heard. As an explorer, it's what you set out to accomplish. To see, to hear, and to find out why. To experience first hand what the soul of a place is, and to know yourself better in the process.

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