

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME TRAVEL

EXPERIENCING THE PAST IN
THE 21ST CENTURY

Edited by

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Chapter 12

Time Travel to the Present
Interview with Erika Andersson Cederholm

Cornelius Holtorf and Bodil Petersson

Biography

Erika Andersson Cederholm is Associate Professor in sociology at the Department of Service Management and Service Studies, Lund University. Her research interests embrace the intersection between culture, economy and social interactions, including service encounters and experiences in tourism and hospitality contexts. Her recent research focusses on the commodification and organisation of intimacy and emotions in hospitality contexts, lifestyle enterprising in the rural experience economy, and the boundary work between economic and non-economic life spheres in various service contexts.

Keywords: Authenticity, experience economy, experience society, lifestyle migrants, tourism

The interview

Cornelius:

Let us talk about time travel! Erika you are a sociologist and a tourist expert. How would you study the phenomenon of time travel that is quite popular these days in society from a sociological perspective?

Erika:

I am not a historian so I do not really have a historical perspective in my research, but I am interested in how people view history or people's ideas of the past and what they do with the past, for instance in different kinds of tourism activities, which I have been studying. So I am interested in actually how people think about past and pastness and what they do with the past and also a bit why it is interesting for people to engage in the past. But I think the why question is quite complex because I think it is many different kind of factors today that make people be interested in the past. Mainly I have been interested in what people associate in the past and what they actually do with it.

Bodil:

You also have this other affiliation to service management, which is part of the name of your Department. Is that also affecting your approach here together with sociology?

Erika:

Yes, definitely, I think so. My training is as a sociologist, and I took my PhD in sociology at the department of sociology at Lund University. But since then I have been working and doing research in a more interdisciplinary environment at service management and service studies at the campus in Helsingborg, and I think that has affected my research and my way of thinking. I have been interested in the interdisciplinary area of service studies and tourism studies. When I was doing my PhD in sociology I was interested in tourism as a phenomenon and touristic experiences (Andersson Cederholm, 1999). In the last few years I have also become more interested in some economic aspects of tourism, but as a sociologist. There is often a tension between economic aspects and other, experience-oriented aspects. I am interested in these kinds of tensions. So my interest in the economic aspect is also related to the fact that I work in an interdisciplinary environment encompassing both service studies and the service industry and so on.

Cornelius:

Is there a particular larger trend in society today which could explain why people are so interested in experiencing the past? Would you connect this phenomenon to bigger movements or trends in society?

Erika:

This is the why question. Why are people so interested in this kind of thing today? It is always complex and there are many different kinds of aspects involved. But one particularly important aspect is, I think, the search for identity and the idea of belonging and participating with other people in doing things. A key concept here is the idea of authenticity. People are longing for authentic experiences in various forms. Why is that so important? I think it is not new that people are longing for authentic experiences, but there is now a new aspect of it. The longing for authentic experiences today is also to a certain extent commodified as an industry around authenticity which makes this interesting for me.

Cornelius:

Is this connected to what some people have called the Experience Society?

Erika:

Yes. It is more generally the idea of the experience society and the experience economy. It is not only about a new form of economy, it is also about cultural movements, new ideas and a new focus on certain issues which have more to do with new ways to searching and confirming identities. So yes.

Bodil:

As a sociologist you have been exploring travelling in some of your work (Andersson Cederholm 2004, 2009). I wonder if you see a huge difference or rather similarities between travels in space and travels in time, if you approach them as a sociologist?

Erika:

Yes, they are related to each other. I think people experience that quite a lot. For many tourists, travelling in space is an important part of the tourist experience; but for many people travelling in space is also associated with travelling in time, as both are about visiting 'other' cultures, 'other' places and the notion of the 'other'. I think people also associate that when doing a certain kind of time travel. In my research I have been interested in rural tourism: people going to the countryside to experience, for instance living or staying on a farm as part of a tourist experience doing activities connected to nature and the rural context (Andersson Cederholm and Sjöholm 2014). In this example urban people travel in space, but there is also an idea of travelling in time because for many people the rural context is associated with nostalgia, with a past of local communities and a sense of belonging. So I think there is a time dimension in the way people experience space in tourism; that there is a move to another place but also another time.

Cornelius:

So that might support the view that the past is a foreign country?

Erika:

Yes, and no. It could be literally but also symbolic, that is in the way it is framed. You go to a certain place which is framed in time and space.

Cornelius:

To what extent would you say that the experience of the past in what we call time travel and pastness is a way of engaging with the social world around us? Is it a medium or a resource which we draw on in order to achieve certain aims in society? How does that work in a sociological perspective?

Erika:

As I mentioned before, I think that the notion of authenticity is very important here. But if you use authenticity as an analytical concept it is important to define what you mean by authenticity. One aspect of authenticity is what I and other authors have been calling existential authenticity (Andersson Cederholm 1999; Wang, 1999). It could be a sense of the past, a sense of belonging, a sense of authenticity. That doesn't necessarily have to do with what is actually authentic in an objective meaning.

One dimension of this existential authenticity is a heightened feeling of presence and of being present here and now, also with other people. I think that that is something that people search for in various ways. A heightened sense of presence actually might sound paradoxical but I think that both the past and the future could be a means of reaching a sense of presence. Whether it is about ideas of the future or ideas of the past, time is a medium for reaching a sense of presence. People long for this in many ways. Tourism experiences are just one way of trying to reach a heightened sense of presence. For example, a tourist going to rural places and staying on a farm or having 'nature' experiences such as horse riding could be associated with the local context and ideas of the past. But sometimes a holiday is also more, a medium for reaching that kind of sense of existential authenticity – being there, being there with other people, being in nature. It could be with other people, but it could also be by yourself.

Bodil:

You describe this kind of existential authenticity very much in terms of a subjective experience and maybe a shared subjectivity between different individuals, but is there a collective side to it as well?

Erika:

Yes. There is always a collective side to it and there is always also an individual and subjective side to it. There is one tourism researcher called Ning Wang, and he has been writing a lot about this existential authenticity concept (Wang 1999). Wang makes a division between what he calls intra-relational existential authenticity and inter-relational existential authenticity. The intra-relational experience could be the very subjective flow-like experience of being totally absorbed in a particular activity. If you climb a mountain or you are alone in a sailing boat surrounded by nature – that is a subjective, individual experience. But then there is also inter-relational existential authenticity which is more focussed on sharing things. So in that meaning you can make a distinction between this very subjective side and the collective social side of it. Of course there is always a collective, social aspect in the very idea of time travel and authenticity; the very idea and the way we talk about it is socially constructed which is a collective dimension. It is also an expression of our time and our society today that we are so interested in time and time travel. So in that sense it is always a cultural, collective social phenomenon.

Cornelius:

Where does all this actually come from? The fact that we are interested in our time in these particular expressions, these forms of time travelling, is that to do at all with media and wider trends in popular culture such as film or literature? Or are these larger social issues? We were talking about identity searching earlier,

is that something which perhaps has changed in character compared to previous generations, even though it is not entirely new?

Erika:

I think it is not entirely new. The historical perspective of the time travel itself is interesting. The idea of time travel comes and goes in history. But why do we think that it is so interesting today? There are many inter-relating factors here. I think the media are a catalyst in the process, and popular culture could be also a very important interesting catalyst. But it is not a cause, it is more one aspect of everything. The industry around experiences, the experience industry and tourism is also one part of it but you can't say that it is a cause either. I think it is something that accentuates the speed and the flow of information around the idea of time travel. There are so many interrelated aspects to why people are interested in searching for experiences and knowledge.

Bodil:

I would like to turn to the material aspects of travelling in space or time. Can there be catalysts of a very material kind? When you perform handicrafts, when you take care of animals or when you make something with your hands, you will get tangible outcomes of that as well. Have you seen a lot of relationships with the material world in your studies?

Erika:

In my studies of tourist experiences and producer perspectives, people start different kinds of tourist-oriented enterprises in the rural context in order to provide experiences for tourists and visitors. One important aspect is that when they try to create experiences they take into consideration all these material things, and they are very important. People have at least an idea and I think also a sort of longing for this important experience of doing things. That could also be a more sports-oriented kind of recreational type of activities like riding horses. I have a project specifically on horse farms. It is very clear in that context that the animals play an important role, not only in the traditional meaning of riding a horse for sport or recreation but also regarding the emotional and embodied experience of being with the animals and doing things with animals (Andersson Cederholm 2014). You can relate that to other kinds of activities such as being engaged in traditional handicraft. One part of a tourist experience is the offering or taking part in traditional craftsmanship, like 'we are making traditional cheese at our farm and as part of your experience you can participate in making cheese in the traditional way', that kind of thing. So that is also a part of that idea of existential authenticity, being there with all your senses and doing things. The material aspects are very important here: things, artefacts, and also other kinds of

mediums like animals. The material side and the sense of authenticity that people get from it are very important indeed.

Cornelius:

One of the characteristics of society is that it is dynamic, that it is constantly changing and that it is difficult to predict in which way it will go. To the extent that time travelling is a social phenomenon, what sort of dynamics would you see affect these various processes, for example in tourism? What sort of conflicts are there, what sort of breaking points may we see that things are changing into something else because not everybody likes this sort of tourism and not everybody is perhaps in favour of it? Some people may not like that tourism commodifies the countryside and commodifies the past and maybe caters for certain kinds of tourists and not for others, and maybe is not sustainable either. How would you describe the significance of these tensions?

Erika:

I think it is a field full of tensions, different kinds of tensions which is interesting in itself. We have the more general tension between the process of commodification and people's experiencing of over-commodification. That is one aspect of searching for authenticity. Many people perceive that if it becomes too commercialised, too commodified, it loses a sense of authenticity. We can see that quite clearly in tourism. For instance, if a place becomes too crowded then people go somewhere else. Searching for the unique is often an important aspect of the tourism experience. But there is a tension because people also want to have confirmation. People want other tourists to be there in order to confirm that this is a good tourist experience; but then on the other hand they also want to go to places where there are no other tourists. So this classic tension in tourism has to do with people's ideas of the unique and the authentic and the idea that a certain type of commodification undermines authenticity.

In heritage tourism we can see that same tension quite clearly, which also has to do with different ideas of what is authentic. For instance, if you are a heritage institution you have a certain obligation of preserving and conserving the authentic objects. From that a conflict with the tourist industry can arise, and also with people's ideas of experiencing the more sensual aspect of authenticity, the existential authenticity. People want to have a *sense* of authenticity, and that is more valuable than the experience we find in the authentic objects sometimes. At the same time, for a tourist it is very important to see the authentic objects. In order to understand this dynamic and this tension it is important, analytically, to make a distinction between different perceptions of authenticity; if you mean the objective authenticity that is immanent *in* certain objects and artefacts or if you are referring more to the experience of the authenticity, the existential authenticity.

There are also other kinds of tensions which are connected to ideas of sustainability and to the idea of time and rhythm: for instance, slowness versus speed, mobility versus embeddedness in the community. People travel all over the world today. There is so much mobility and yet there are also increasingly ideals that you shouldn't travel so much due to sustainability problems. So we have also got emerging trends towards slow travel and near tourism. You shouldn't go to the other side of the world, but go to your nearby village instead and experience something of that village or of your own town. That is another tension.

Cornelius:

Heritage doesn't always have to provide exclusively positive experiences. There is another heritage: dark heritage, connected to the terrible parts of history which you can also visit and experience. People appreciate that too, when they visit concentration camps, for example, or prisons and places like that.

Erika:

Yes we have this idea of dark tourism. It is a very wide concept actually because everything is included, from visiting concentration camps or historical battlefields to foreign nuclear power plants. Dark tourism is a wide range of different kinds of experiences, even including the heritage associated with disaster and death. There are interesting moral issues and debates going on. What is a proper site; where to go as a tourist or where not to go; what is possible to commodify, and what should not be commodified? There are continuous negotiations of what is appropriate and not appropriate; what is good tourism and what is bad tourism; what is the good past and the bad past; what can we show to people, and what can we not show to people.

Bodil:

If you apply a time aspect to this then maybe more darkness is permissible when you go farther back in time. Do you have this time filter which makes it easier to approach disasters and death in the past?

Erika:

Yes. That is an interesting aspect. When a certain time has passed, such sites become more acceptable to visit. It is interesting to know the limit. How long back is it possible, or how close in time is it not possible to visit? When you want to define something as acceptable, this also is connected to how you define cultural heritage. There is also a time aspect, how far back in time do you have to go in order to call something heritage. So that is all part of negotiations. For a sociologist, it is interesting to see how people negotiate here; how they draw the boundaries between what belongs to the past and what belongs to the present, what is good and what is bad, what is authentic and what is not authentic, what is okay to

commodify and what is not okay to commodify. It is actually very much about boundary work, a concept that I use very much in my research. It is a constant making and remaking of these boundaries.

Cornelius:

To stick with this notion of boundaries for a bit longer, what do you say about time travel as a way of transgressing the boundary of our society in a way of leaving our society? Is a time travel a statement against the ruling conditions in some form, a desire to find an alternative to our way of life? Is it an escape from something that one experiences as imperfect, to say the least, or outright negative?

Erika:

I think that time travel is experienced by many people as an escape. It is important for people to draw boundaries in order to have this heightened experience. For instance, if you go as a tourist to a nearby village, you are very familiar with this village. But in order to create a special experience, you need to frame it in time and in space. Establishing a boundary to your ordinary life makes it an extraordinary experience. It is one essential aspect in tourism – and also in the sort of construction of experiences in general – that you need this sort of bubble that you go into, this ‘frame’, even if you travel nearby, in a ‘staycation’. I don’t know if you are familiar with that concept, it is a sort of a mix between staying and going on vacation. In order to appreciate this staycation experience as a tourist you need to have clear boundaries established. The escapist aspect of tourism is always there. You want to go somewhere else or to another place or time or to go into this bubble. These boundaries are very, very dynamic; they are remade all the time. We are continuously pushing the boundaries of what is considered as an appropriate tourist experience. It is not only a psychological aspect. I am interested in the more collective and the social construction of these boundaries. It is not only about one individual creating a bubble, a time-space bubble if you like. We always have a collective idea of doing this; that it is okay for us to go on this kind of holiday or go on a staycation or go somewhere else. There is always a social process involved in this kind of defining and making boundaries.

Cornelius:

There are some people today who decide to live permanently on the other side of the boundary as it were: people who don’t escape for a while but decide to live permanently as tourists, so to speak, perhaps offering certain experiences to other tourists. How do they fit in? How can you transgress these boundaries permanently? Are new boundaries maybe created as a result?

Erika:

I think that is a very interesting aspect. I am doing research on people who may be so-called lifestyle migrants, that is people leaving an urban environment and careers moving out to the countryside, perhaps in order to start a small business. They've always dreamed, for instance, about starting a small bed and breakfast, or about having a horse farm for tourists. They can share their life dream with other people and also sell this idea to tourists. This is very interesting because on the one hand they are tourists but on the other hand the tourist experience becomes everyday life for them after a while. They live their daily lives there, and they have their work, and their children go to school, and it can become a grey everyday life, like for everybody else. But at the same time, their lifestyle, which is part of why they have been moving there in the first place, that lifestyle is also attractive to other people. Visitors are attracted to go there, not only to spend a few nights in that particular bed and breakfast, but also to experience the host's lifestyle. So in a way they don't just sell a conventional service product in hospitality, food and accommodation, but they also sell their lifestyle. People go there and they consume their host's lifestyle. It is important for these lifestyle migrants, in order to sell their product, to market their lifestyle, live in this bubble, in order that other people will be attracted to it. It is interesting to see how they maintain these boundaries around their world and their lifestyle without being drawn back into that everyday grey life. They do a lot of work to maintain that boundary. For instance, they do storytelling and marketing on their websites. They tell the story of how they left the urban lifestyle and started a new life in the countryside. They often emphasize these personal aspects by telling all the names of their family members and the cats and the dogs and so on. That storytelling is one part of creating an image: 'We live the perfect lifestyle here. We are a happy family. We are offering experiences to you to come here and be happy at least for those two days that you stay with us.' One tool that they use is storytelling and marketing. Having said that, I don't think that these people often consider themselves as very skillful marketers. They do this more or less unconsciously. They have a feeling that people are attracted to come there because of them.

But there are different ways of trying to create this boundary. Another strategy is emphasizing the small scale of the production. For instance, if they have food production, it is presented as handicraft, a craftsmanship-oriented type of traditional production. The visitors can partake in the production process. This often includes animals, and the hosts are offering different kinds of animal experiences. All these are lifestyle migrants who are both living their dream and also selling their dream. They are an interesting case. They are both tourists and non-tourists at the same time.

Cornelius:

In a way their dream is, of course, part of the urban world today. We understand immediately what you mean because it's familiar to all of us. Lifestyle migrants may find that their neighbours came from a different city. So they are not really leaving the city but still bound up in a set of norms and values that we urban folk can all relate to.

Erika:

Yes, caught in the norm of the rural idyll and the countryside. Today, the boundaries between the urban and the rural are very blurred. What is rural, really, and what is urban? It is very much interconnected. But it is in the interest of these tourist businesses that the boundaries and distinctions are maintained in order to sell the rural dream or the ideal. Everything that is associated with the rural – with the local community, sense of belonging and all these ideas of the authentic – is important for people today.

Bodil:

All this is about leaving the urban lifestyle for the rural one. Are there other tendencies today, approaching other lifestyles than the rural one? For example, we are told sometimes that we live in a post-industrial society and that there are movements towards commodifying the industrial era. Can you see that tendency in society?

Erika:

Yes, well in tourism there is quite a large trend of visiting industrial heritage. Industrial heritage tourism is an important industry and that includes not only the old mining industry but also newer industries that are no longer working. This is definitely something that seems to be emerging. Going to other places and other times, really takes so many different shapes. It could be the rural, it could be the industrial heritage, it could be going to very far places and other cultures. The idea of the 'other' is important, and there is often both a cultural and a temporal distance connected to that. The idea of other people or other places is very abstract; but as long as it is something 'other', there is some attractiveness in that.

Cornelius:

There seems to be, at least in my superficial view, a certain sense that the 'self' needs the 'other' to define itself. It is not the case that you need to find other selves who are more or less similar. Instead you need to contrast that. You need to experience something that is different, whether that is in time or in space or some other transgression of experience. I wonder if that existed in all previous periods or exists similarly in other parts of the world today.

Erika:

I think the romantic idea of the other has a history. But there are many forms of 'others' today. The supply of otherness is so large. You can choose a large variety of otherness in different ways. There is an industry of otherness. This is a new aspect today. It is so interesting to contrast ourselves with the 'other', both seeing the similarities and the differences. They are just like us, and they are different. We have both these aspects and each could come out in many ways.

Cornelius:

So the best time travel offers the prospect of experiencing the 'other' without leaving your own country?

Erika:

Yes, you can say that, because you can find the other next door. You can find the other everywhere. It is easier to find the other today than it was before. I mean the other in that abstract meaning; not in the essential meaning of someone who is 'the other', but the object of otherness as it changes all the time. But we live in a global society and globalisation contributes to all these different aspects. It is important to consider globalisation and the cultural variety that we have. It is easy to find the other everywhere.

Bodil:

Could you say that time travel is a more sustainable way of travelling?

Erika:

Yeah, because the temporal aspect is there in the idea of 'the other'. If you have an idea of even a contemporary other, you can see some pastness in this contemporary other that you can see in your own society. It could be more difficult and maybe not so attractive, to look for the past in your own local society – you can see the past best through other people. There is always this attraction of the idea of searching for the past.

Cornelius:

When you refer to the past and to pastness then you are not talking about detailed chronologies in the way a historian might do but you are referring to a particular experience. How important are the senses and emotions in that?

Erika:

I think they are very important. Going back to this notion of existential authenticity, which is a wide concept, the essential aspect is that you are there with your whole mind and body. This is very important, triggering all your senses. The tourist industry has hooked onto this, too. Maybe the reason for this demand

is an experience of lack, a lack of something essential. People are perhaps searching somewhere else for the existential experiences they are missing in their ordinary lives. Or maybe they need organised forms of existential experiences. Or maybe you need the organised forms so you will be able to talk about existential experiences. I don't know. Of course, you have existential experiences all the time. You are always there or here with all your feelings and emotions. You can't really divide emotional or cognitive aspects. These more organized forms of existential experience allow us nevertheless to speak of an ideal or even a norm that you should experience with your whole body and feeling. This emergence in something bodily and emotionally can take the form of tourism or it can take the form of going to the gym or to a dance class.

Cornelius:

So on one level, one thinks that the senses are something very personal and very subjective: 'only I know what I like, and it is just up to me'. On another level, you prove the opposite: that it is all determined by the social context in which we find ourselves. When we follow certain trends, we often follow more general trends and norms. How do the subjective and the collective go together in this?

Erika:

I look very much at the collective – indeed, the very idea of the subjective is also a collective idea. The idea of being there with yourself and as a subject is a socially constructed idea. This is my sociological mind. I can't really escape from that. I always see everything in this social aspect. But of course I can't deny that there is an individual dimension too. There is a constant tension between the two. This is a classic tension in social science between the actor and the structure – the individual and the collective. There is an emphasis on the subjective and the individual experience in our society, which is due to our historical context. There is a very strong cultural ideal which emphasizes the individual and the subjective. That is also visible when it comes to the experience industry. The subjective experience and the individual experience are very important and also sensual. You should be there with all your senses and experience, but it is always connected to social norms on how you should express your individuality and your subjectivity. Is it okay to go on a time travel to this place or to that place? There are always norms. So in that sense it is always social. The social structures emphasise the individual and subjective experience in our society.

Cornelius:

Can you see a tendency of different social groups choosing different ways not of time travelling but of experiencing?

Erika:

Definitely, I think there are different kinds of social groups preferring different kinds of experiences. You can see it from an economic perspective and talk about

different types of consumers who prefer different kinds of experiences. But I think it also has a wider sociological meaning. You can see differences based on class, gender and ethnicity; and all these aspects are also related to how we want to experience things. If, for instance, we really enjoy experiencing the past through nature, or the idea of going to the countryside, I think there is a cultural aspect to that. At the same time, it is not something that everybody wants to do, but it is also to a certain extent class related. In Sweden, for instance, there is a long history of the urban middle class going to the countryside in order to recreate. I don't know how much similar behaviour is class-related today, but there certainly is a history of the urban middle class wanting to go to experience the countryside. There are definitely different groups having different kinds of norms and ideals.

Cornelius:

In a way you could maybe say: 'tell me which past you want to travel to, and I tell you who you are'.

Erika:

Well that is a dream for marketers. I think there is a lot of truth in that statement, although it is always a bit more complex than that.

Cornelius:

In all the examples you gave and then the points you made, you always came back to the point that as time travellers we are travelling to the past, but really we are travelling to our own time. On one level we are leaving the present but on another one, at the same time, we are returning home.

Erika:

Yes, I think so. I think that is a very good conclusion. I think that we are travelling to ourselves in many ways; or we want to reconfirm our sense of identity, our cultural norms and our ideals through something that is 'other'. That could be another time, another place, but I think we need that in order to confirm our identity. So in that sense, time travel is about us. Even if it is about going somewhere else, it is very much about us and our time.

Cornelius:

By going somewhere else we can stay where we are.

Erika:

Yes, but we nevertheless change a little bit along the way.

Cornelius and Bodil:

Thank you for talking to us!

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