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## review essay

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### **Experiencing the past? The development of a phenomenological archaeology in British prehistory** *Joanna Brück*

#### **Abstract**

In recent years the development of a phenomenological archaeology has provoked considerable discussion within the discipline, particularly within British prehistory. This paper provides a review of this challenging body of research, outlining its problems and potentials and setting it within its broader disciplinary context. Phenomenology has been used to great effect to critique the Cartesian rationalism inherent in traditional archaeological approaches, encouraging imaginative and valuable reinterpretations of the architecture and landscape settings of different monuments. Nonetheless, there are a number of significant problems raised by this work. The suggestion that the archaeologist's embodied engagement with an ancient monument or landscape can provide an insight into past experiences and interpretations is critically considered. The epistemological status of the knowledge-claims made, including how and whether the patterns identified should be verified, is discussed. The contribution of phenomenology to postprocessual debates surrounding concepts of the self, the individual, embodiment and emotion are also explored. The work of key proponents of phenomenology such as Tilley and Thomas provides a particular focus, although a range of other authors are also considered.

#### **Keywords**

Phenomenology; experience; embodiment; self; landscape; epistemology

#### **Introduction**

The use of phenomenology in archaeology has been one of the most provocative theoretical developments in the discipline in recent years. Insights drawn from this branch of philosophy have been employed in two ways: first as a source of critical reflection on Cartesian positivism, and second as hermeneutic tools to aid the interpretation of the material remains of the past. The work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and others has been discussed in some detail in this growing body of literature, although critics have questioned the extent to which descriptions of the character of human experience specific to the modern Western world can illuminate the difference of past societies (Gosden 1996; Weiner 1996). Phenomenological archaeology has made its most significant impact in British prehistory, particularly the Neolithic, and this paper will therefore focus on British literature, although

scholars in other traditions have also written on the subject (e.g. Karlsson 2000).

The following discussion will consider the problems and potential of a phenomenological archaeology. It will not provide a detailed overview of the diverse philosophical field of phenomenology (for this, readers may refer to texts such as Embree (1997), Moran (2000) and Sokolowski (2000); for a useful shorter summary, see Casey (1996)) but will focus exclusively on archaeological applications of phenomenological thought. No attempt will be made to assess particular archaeologists' depth of knowledge or understanding of phenomenology (see for example Gosden 1996, 23–24); instead, what is at issue here is the way in which ideas drawn from this area of philosophy have been employed to interpret archaeological material.

The development of a phenomenological archaeology will also be set within its broader disciplinary context. For example, as we shall see, questions of inhabitation, experience and embodiment have become central concerns for archaeologists drawing on a range of theoretical frameworks, and it may be useful to situate phenomenological approaches in relation to these wider debates. The impact of postmodernism on archaeology is of particular relevance here. The contemporary preoccupation of Western society with body image and the presentation of the self is reflected in archaeological debates exploring the body as cultural artefact and the role of embodiment in shaping personal experience. Postmodernist discourse has also provoked a concern with materiality; the extent to which the material world can be regarded as 'real' or should be seen as a product of cultural representations has been widely discussed in archaeology. Phenomenological approaches have had much to contribute on these issues, although there have often been radical divergences of opinion with other branches of postprocessual archaeology; some of these debates will be explored here.

### Phenomenology in archaeology

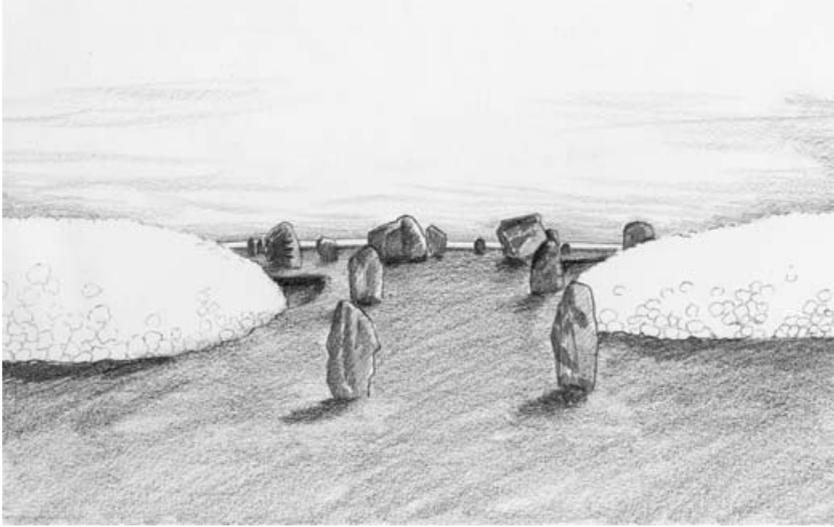
Phenomenology aims to describe the character of human experience, specifically the ways in which we apprehend the material world through directed intervention in our surroundings. The nature and significance of materiality is clearly at the heart of the archaeological endeavour, and a thorough understanding of how humans come to perceive and understand the material world is therefore crucial. Importantly, although phenomenology studies consciousness from the perspective of the subject, it also attempts to break down the subject–object divide so central to post-Enlightenment thought (e.g. Heidegger 1962; Merleau-Ponty 1996). It is argued that embodied engagement with the material world is constitutive of existence. In other words, it is through the performance of actions that have an effect in the world that we realize our being. Things make us, just as we make things. For a discipline which argues for the social, cultural and ontological centrality of objects to the human species, phenomenological approaches clearly provide an antidote to abstract models which prioritize the role of the mind in human cognition.

The publication of Tilley's book *A phenomenology of landscape* in 1994 provoked considerable interest within the archaeological community. It

represents the first complete volume on this subject within the discipline, although, around the same time, Thomas (1993a) and Gosden (1994, 42–45, 107–14) also began to discuss the relevance of Heidegger's work for archaeology. This has been followed by a series of further publications (Tilley 1996; 1999, chapters 5 and 6; 2004a; 2004b) in which Tilley's ideas are further elaborated. Building on research that considered how patterns of access and exclusion within Neolithic monuments may have reflected and sustained social differences, he develops an innovative approach to the interpretation of prehistoric landscapes (1994). He begins by drawing on phenomenology to critique traditional understandings of landscape that present this as neutral space onto which human activities are mapped (1994, 7–11). He discusses cartographic representations of landscape, arguing that these must be contextualized as a product of capitalist economics which represent landscape as a quantifiable resource that can be mapped, measured, bought and sold (1994, 20–26). As other writers have also pointed out (e.g. Cosgrove 1984; Harley 1988; Thomas 1993b; Bender 1998), the objectification of landscape – its separation from memory, meaning, personal experience and identity – legitimated this process.

Building on these points, Tilley (1994, 26–34) argues that archaeologists need to re-engage with the qualitative aspects of landscape by exploring the ways in which social and cultural meanings are ascribed to places. The significance of past landscapes cannot be grasped, he contends, by creating abstract two-dimensional representations of space. Instead, human experience and understanding of the world are mediated through the body (1994, 11–14; 2004a, 2–19). Because the body is always already in the world, it has no existence apart from the world, and the world itself can only be realized through embodied experience. As such, place is always experienced as three-dimensional and sensuous, a point that is all too often lost in traditional archaeological accounts of landscape. The physical engagement of the human body with the material world is therefore central to experience; toiling uphill to reach an ancestral tomb on an isolated mountaintop helps to give particular potency to this act. Bodily placement and orientation ensure that our understanding of space is always situated and contextual (2004a, 10–12). We cannot 'know' the world in an objective and totalizing way, as our understanding of it derives from an embedded and necessarily partial perspective. Bodily movement through space is therefore crucial as it provides people with a particular way of viewing the world (Figure 1), so that the sequence in which things are encountered creates a narrative that structures understanding (1994, 27–33). These points have important implications for the maintenance of power relations. By controlling the way people move through space, it is possible to reproduce dominant 'perspectives' on the world by restricting possible ways of seeing and interpreting the landscape (1994, 204).

These insights have inspired novel ways of engaging with the material remains of the past. Tilley argues that to understand a landscape or monument, it is necessary for archaeologists to document their own physical engagement with these spaces as they move around and through them (1994, 73–75; 2004a, 27–28). This allows detailed consideration of how these spaces



**Figure 1** Thomas's reconstruction (1993b, Figure 1.2) of the view through the southern entrance of the henge monument at Avebury, Wiltshire, as it might have looked in the Neolithic (redrawn by Ursula Mattenberger).

work on the body to create a particular understanding of a place. He provides a series of narratives on his own embodied encounters with a variety of prehistoric landscapes, detailing in words and photographs his experience as he walked from one location to another (1994; 2004a; 2004b). He considers, for example, the views from particular locations (e.g. 1994, 93), the order in which different spaces within a monument are encountered (e.g. 2004a, 122–30), the way in which monuments may mimic elements of the physical landscape (e.g. 1994, 105) (Figure 2), and his own bodily experience of topographic features such as rocky ground, steep slopes and marshy areas (e.g. 1994, 181–84). He suggests that the archaeologist's encounter with a monument or landscape in the present can provide particular insights into the ways in which past peoples experienced and interpreted these places. Because we engage today with the same physical landscape, and because our experience of that landscape – like that of past people – is mediated via the human body, our views and interpretations may share important elements (2004b, 201–2). In other words, Tilley employs phenomenology as a methodology as well as a philosophy, arguing that it can provide an entry point into past understandings of the material world.

The second writer who can be credited with developing a phenomenological approach within archaeology is Thomas (e.g. 1993a; 1993b; 1996; 2004). Thomas draws on phenomenology to develop a sustained and insightful critique of Cartesian positivism. He argues that an implicit acceptance of the ontological primacy of the material world underlies the majority of archaeological writing (1996, 25–29; 2002; 2004, 210–14). Both the New Archaeology, which prioritizes the objective recording of data, and postprocessual approaches, which argue that things can be interpreted in many different ways, accept the prior existence of the material world



**Figure 2** Tilley (1994, 105) suggests that the capstone of the portal tomb at Pentre Ifan, south-west Wales, mimics the shape of the mountain to its west, Carn Ingli (after Tilley 1994, Figure 3.19).

– although in the latter case it is argued that a veneer of cultural and subjective meaning is laid down on top of physical reality. He traces the history of dualisms such as mind–body, culture–nature and subject–object (1996, 11–16), setting these firmly within the conceptual framework of post-Enlightenment rationalism. Like Tilley, he argues that the embedded nature of human experience means that ‘subject’ and ‘object’ cannot be separated as each is part of the other (1993a; 1996). Drawing on Heidegger’s work, he suggests that things always reveal themselves to us ‘as’ something (2004, 143, 216–17); in other words, it is not possible ever to see things as pure, dehistoricized and objective matter as they become recognizable only within the structure of intelligibility through which we understand the world. This means that the world – as we know it – cannot exist apart from us. At the same time, however, it is our immersion in the physical world that announces our own existence to us. These points allow Thomas to develop a very different theory of materiality to that common in archaeology (see Johnston 1998).

Thomas’s work can be contrasted with Tilley’s in a number of ways. Like Tilley, he discusses prehistoric monuments and landscapes in some detail, but he also considers portable artefacts (1998; 1996, chapter 6). By exploring the ways in which objects can come to constitute part of the person, he deconstructs the categorical distinction between self and other which underpins Cartesian models of the world. The temporality of being is also a central element of his work. Following Heidegger, he argues that the world is revealed to us historically (1996, 78–82); our understanding of phenomena

– and of ourselves – is dependant on prior experience and knowledge at both an individual and a social level (see also Gosden 1994; for critical discussion, see Küchler 1996). Local and regional histories therefore feature more prominently in Thomas's writings (e.g. 1996, chapter 5) than in those of Tilley. Finally, he does not describe and discuss contemporary experiences of monuments in an overt way, although these undoubtedly inform aspects of his interpretations of the past.

### Archaeologies of the senses

Over the past decade, a number of writers – primarily working within British prehistory – have employed approaches similar to that developed by Tilley, in which the embodied experience of the archaeologist in the present is used as a means of addressing past interpretations of monuments and landscapes (e.g. Richards 1996; Fraser 1998; Brophy 1999; Watson 2001; Cummings 2002a). Watson (2001), for example, describes how landscape setting and architectural form shape the experience of space at Avebury in Wiltshire. He describes the views encountered as one enters and moves around the Neolithic henge. Approaching Avebury along the Avenue, for example, it is not possible to see into the monument until one has nearly reached it (2001, 300). By hiding the interior in this way, a sense of mystery and exclusion is created. Once inside the monument, the only location from which the entire interior is visible is from within the Inner Circle (2001, 306). From here, it is possible to see the hills outside the monument. The profile of the enclosing bank closely matches the shape of these hills, so that the form of the monument acts as a miniature model of a circular cosmos. Taking a similar approach, Cummings (2002a, 132–33) argues that chambered tombs of the Clyde group in south-west Scotland were deliberately positioned overlooking the sea. Bargrennan-type tombs, on the other hand, were located so that they had good views of the Merrick Hills and they were often set close to distinctive outcrops, some of which they appear to mimic in shape (2002a, 134). These suggestions are based on the author's description of her own embodied encounter with these monuments.

One way in which some of these writers have attempted to complement Tilley's first publication (1994) has been by considering different aspects of bodily experience. A number of authors have argued that visual modes of perception have been overemphasized in phenomenological research (Criado Boado and Villoch Vázquez 2000, 189; Mills 2000; Hamilakis 2002, 122; Cummings and Whittle 2003). They point out that the significance of senses such as smell, touch and hearing in shaping experience have been underplayed. This can be linked to the primacy of vision as a mode of appropriation in the modern Western world (e.g. Jay 1988; Duncan 1993; Thomas 1993b). Hence, although the historiography of the Cartesian 'gaze' inherent in the production of archaeological maps and plans has been thoroughly deconstructed within phenomenological accounts, it has not been fully exorcised from these. Chadwick (2004a, 22), for example, argues that Tilley's 'solitary strolls and musings were very much in an appropriating, antiquarian tradition'. To redress the balance, a number of studies have explored the role of hearing and touch in shaping our experience of the material world (e.g. MacGregor

1999; Watson and Keating 1999; Houston and Taube 2000; Watson 2001; Cummings and Whittle 2003; Tilley 2004a). Cummings (2002b), for example, has identified careful patterning in the placement of stones of different textures in British Neolithic tombs. Watson (2001; Watson and Keating 1999) has investigated the role of sound in a variety of Neolithic monuments and has argued that the architecture of many such sites was deliberately designed to create particular sound effects. For example, at Camster Round, Caithness, the beating of a drum at a specific frequency would have caused the chambered tomb to resonate, resulting in a marked amplification of sound. This is likely to have had interesting sensory effects amongst the people inside the monument and may have induced feelings of drowsiness, balance disturbance and speaking difficulties (Watson and Keating 1999, 331–33).

### Pattern, significance and purpose

The development of a ‘sensual’ archaeology has been an important step in elucidating the various ways in which artefacts, buildings and landscapes affect the embodied experience of their users. However, it shares one of the problems of vision-oriented studies in that it is often impossible for the reader to judge whether the relationships identified by the archaeologist in the present were indeed considered significant in the past. Let us begin by considering this question in relation to intervisibility. It is often argued that monuments were carefully located so as to ensure views of particular landscape features while others were deliberately obscured (e.g. Tilley 1994; Bender, Hamilton and Tilley 1997; Cummings 2002a). Hence it is suggested that elements of the topography such as mountains or lakes were significant places in the past (e.g. Tilley 1996).

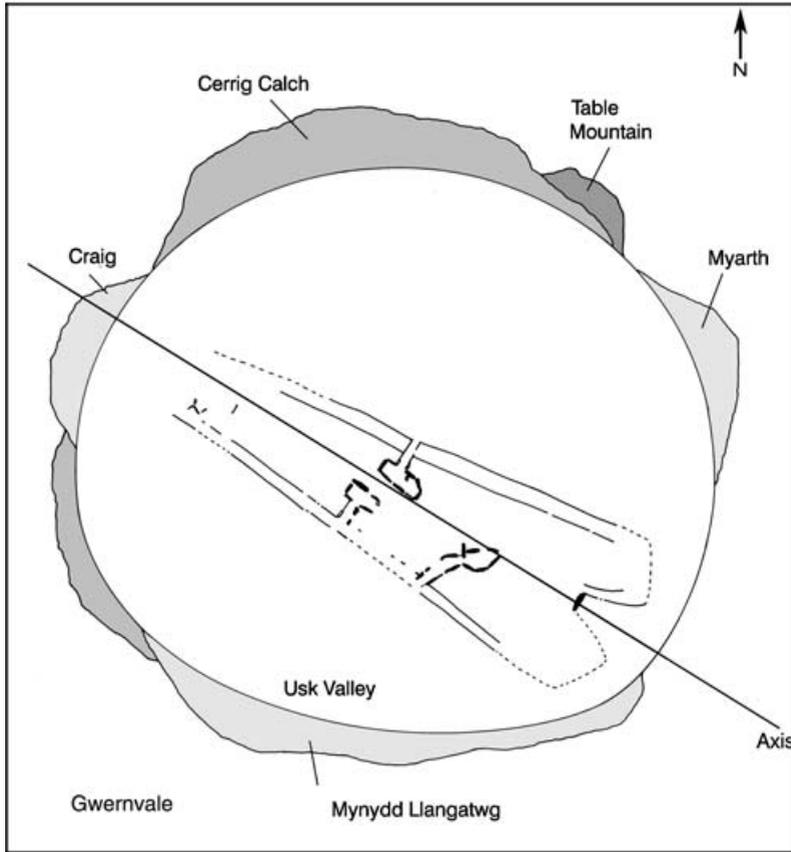
However, these statements are not always adequately supported (Fleming 1999; Criado Boado and Villoch Vázquez 2000; Chadwick 2004a, 21; DeBoer 2004). The simple fact of intervisibility does not in itself indicate that those who built and used a monument either recognized this visual relationship or considered it significant. This is not to claim (*contra* Tilley 2004b, 202) that monuments were not carefully located in the landscape. Rather, we need to consider critically which particular elements of a monument’s landscape context can be identified as important factors influencing its location in the past and which cannot. This requires careful distinction between association and causation. An association may be accidental – the unintended outcome of other factors. DeBoer (2004), for example, points out that it is hardly surprising that barrows on high ground are often intervisible with one another while those on low ground are not. Fleming (1999, 120) argues that the apparent relationship between monuments and rock outcrops in North Preseli may be the result of preferential survival of these sites in areas of marginal, stony land that were not intensively farmed in later millennia and where the availability of building materials to subsequent generations meant that tombs were not robbed out. He also critically considers how relationships should be identified, asking, for example, how close a monument needs to be to a particular topographic feature for a deliberate link between the two to be posited. Similar points can be made regarding the significance of other sensory elements of monuments

and landscapes. For example, it is not always clear whether the acoustic properties claimed for megalithic tombs, stone circles and other Neolithic monuments were indeed deliberate design features or the chance results of particular traditions of architecture (Lawson *et al.* 1998, 119–20); all enclosed spaces have, after all, an effect on the operation of sound waves.

The problem, then, is that the relationships claimed are not always demonstrated or supported adequately. It is not enough (*contra* Tilley 2004a, 219–20) simply to invite readers to evaluate observations and arguments for themselves by revisiting the monument or landscape in question. Although it is undoubtedly worthy to encourage diversity of opinion, most readers are unlikely to have the time and resources to do so. However, there are a number of ways in which phenomenological writers have attempted to illustrate the relationships they identify. Tilley (1994) employs photographs to demonstrate visual relationships between places. Cummings (2000; Cummings, Jones and Watson 2002) has experimented with innovative ways of representing the visual fields of megalithic tombs, for example by using photomontages and line drawings to show the view for a full 360° around a site (Figure 3).<sup>1</sup> Others have attempted to integrate photographs, video and sound recordings to re-create embodied encounters with particular landscapes (e.g. Mills 2000). Such techniques allow landscapes to be represented from the perspective of lived experience in contrast to the abstract totalization of traditional cartography. However, the use of photography and video footage as evidence to support the claims made for particular relationships must be treated with caution as the images produced are not objective records but are themselves selected and edited representations of landscape (Chadwick 2004a, 21).

With contemporary developments in technology, it is hardly surprising that virtual reality modelling (VRM) should have been employed to examine the architecture and landscape context of particular sites (e.g. Pollard and Gillings 1998; Edmonds and McElearney 1999). Like the other techniques outlined above, this overcomes the abstracted perspective of two-dimensional mapping. For example, it is possible to reconstruct the unfolding visual field as one moves through a building or to consider the wider visual setting in which a monument was located. VRM provides researchers with the facility to examine orientation, intervisibility and other visual effects and allows the evaluation of claims made regarding the relationships between places in the landscape (Goodrick and Gillings 2000). It is especially useful where there have been significant changes to geomorphology, vegetation or the form of a monument over time (for instance through the erosion of banks or the collapse of walls). It can also cancel out factors such as modern buildings that might otherwise affect our experience of ancient landscapes. Moreover, by providing the ‘reader’ with the facility to move around a building or landscape as desired, it is argued that VRM can facilitate multiple experiences of place (Edmonds and McElearney 1999; Cummings 2000).

Related questions have been addressed by archaeologists employing geographical information systems (GIS) to investigate the landscape context of particular classes of site. GIS is able to analyse patterns of intervisibility between sites, taking into account factors such as changes in vegetation over time, and it has been argued that such analyses may usefully augment



**Figure 3** A schematic representation of the 360° view from the chambered tomb at Gwernvale, south-east Wales (after Cummings, Jones and Watson 2002, Figure 2, redrawn by Ursula Mattenberger).

phenomenological approaches (e.g. Llobera 1996; Wheatley 1996; 2004; Bell and Lock 2000; Roughley 2004). Currently, phenomenological accounts tend to be primarily descriptive. Data that demonstrate regularities in the siting of monuments or in the creation of particular visual, auditory or haptic effects are not always provided (but see, for example, Cummings 2002a). Fleming (1999), discussing Tilley's work (1994), points out that the sample size of sites examined is small and that it is therefore difficult to validate the relationships identified between monuments and other features of the landscape. Similarly, Criado Boado and Villoch Vázquez (2000) have argued for the importance of systematic analysis of visual effects for demonstrable patterns. Practitioners of GIS argue that the technique may provide just this role. Because GIS can examine the landscape context of large numbers of sites, it may be possible to demonstrate that the relationships identified are unlikely to be the result of chance factors alone. Such work can help underpin arguments for the deliberate siting of monuments in relation to topographic features such as mountains, rock outcrops or lakes, or to other classes of site.

Both GIS and VRM have rightly been criticized, however, for their continued adherence to an objectivist, Cartesian model of space (Chadwick 2004a, 21; Thomas 2004, 198–201). Indeed, the detached and analytical character of GIS runs counter to the spirit of phenomenological approaches, and this is doubtless one reason why supposedly ‘objective’ spatial analyses have not generally played a significant role in such work. VRM by its very nature assumes the existence of a ‘real’ and quantifiable external world into which the viewer can simply be slotted (Thomas 2004, 198–201). It transforms meaningful places composed of multilayered social and sensory experiences into disembodied spaces in which people play a minimal role (Chadwick 2004a, 21). The assumption that it allows us to strip away ‘distorting’ factors such as modern buildings or contemporary vegetation cover to reveal a pristine prehistoric landscape is clearly problematic. As I shall discuss below, people’s engagement, experience and interpretation of landscape is not determined entirely by its material form. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the ability of GIS and VRM to demonstrate relationships between places may help to elucidate the network of symbolical links within which particular locations were constituted as socially significant elements of past landscapes, and their value should not therefore be dismissed out of hand.

### Experiencing the landscape

Perhaps the most important question here is whether contemporary encounters with landscape – whether achieved using virtual reality modelling or acquired via embodied engagement with the landscape itself – can ever approximate the actual experience of people in the past. Most readers, I suspect, would agree that such an assumption is problematic. However, this suggestion implicitly underlies Tilley’s approach (1994; 1996; 1999, chapters 5 and 6; 2004a; 2004b).

Phenomenological approaches describe the embodied encounters of people in the present with landscapes, monuments and artefacts from the past. Tilley (1994; 2004a) argues that there are important points of common connection between present and past human experience. The human body and the physical landscape act as constants that impose the same limitations on physical movement today as they did in the past. As he puts it, ‘we and the people of the past share carnal bodies’ (2004b, 201). He therefore argues that his own bodily engagement with a landscape will not differ substantially from that of someone in the Neolithic or Bronze Age. According to philosophical phenomenology, directed intervention in the material world is what constitutes experience and shapes interpretation. For Tilley, then, the physical experience of an archaeologist as he or she walks across a landscape today provides an entry point into people’s interpretations of that landscape in the past (2004a, 219–25).

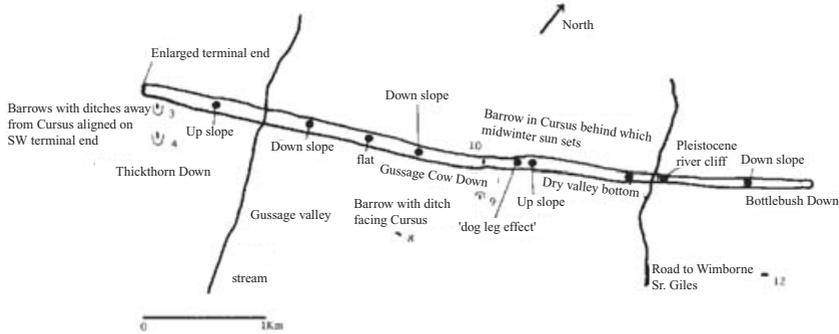
This is doubtless the argument that has held out the most promise but has also been most hotly debated. Many students and scholars have replicated Tilley’s approach, producing their own descriptions of walking particular landscapes, yet it is unclear to what extent these studies have really added to our understanding of the past. The debates have centred on the extent to which

contemporary and past experiences of landscape actually match (e.g. Brück 1998; Jones 1998, 10; Criado Boado and Villoch Vázquez 2000; Tarlow 2000, 724; Barrett 2004). A number of scholars have pointed out that it is highly problematic to represent the human body as a universal (Meskell 1996; Brück 1998; Hodder 1999, 136; Fowler 2002, 59; Hamilakis, Pluciennik and Tarlow 2002, 9). There is considerable variability in the physical attributes of the human body so that different types of person – the young and the old, men and women, the able-bodied and the infirm – experience the material world in different ways.

Perhaps more importantly, the body is a product of social relations and cultural values (e.g. Feher, Nadaff and Tazi 1989; Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner 1991; Shilling 1993; Douglas 1996). It forms a locus for the construction of identity and the mediation of the relationship between individual and society. As such, it is a site of contested meanings. However, the body is not simply a neutral entity on which symbolic significance is inscribed. Rather, embodied experience is shaped by cultural principles and in turn sustains particular interpretations of the world (Tarlow 2000, 719, 728–29). This means that experience of the same material conditions can vary both within and between societies. Bodily practices, including specific ways of moving and particular gestures, are learnt, and in many societies are intimately associated with certain categories of person (Bourdieu 1977 (1972), 93–94). Activities such as walking, stooping, kneeling or running may be ascribed culturally specific meanings, which in turn impact on their experience. Our own bodily encounters with ancient monuments are therefore unlikely to match those of past people.

The second point of commonality between past and present suggested by Tilley (1994, 2004a) is the material world. In a discussion of round barrows and cross-ridge dykes on the Dorset Ridgeway, he argues that ‘the “bones” of the land, the lines and forms of the coombes and ridges in the present case, were virtually the same in the Bronze Age and Iron Age past as they are now. Only some metres of erosion and colluvium separate us and them’ (2004b, 201–2). He therefore contends that his experience of the material world will have much in common with that of people in the past and suggests that through gradual familiarization with a particular landscape ‘one hopefully achieves a feeling and sensibility for place’ (2004a, 219). For example, he describes his embodied engagement with the physical attributes of Cranborne Chase as he moves along the Dorset cursus (1994, 173–96) and argues that features such as a sudden dip, a marshy patch or a steep incline would have had similar effects on Neolithic people’s experience of landscape as they have on his own (Figure 4).

Importantly, Tilley (1994; 1999, chapters 5 and 6; 2004a; 2004b) suggests that a phenomenological approach can help archaeologists to access and understand not only past experiences, but also past interpretations, including the symbolic meanings ascribed to particular materials, landscape features and places. A close link between interpretation and experience seems reasonable if, as a number of authors have recently argued (e.g. Tarlow 2000; Thomas 2004, 143), interpretation is the product of culturally circumscribed embodied engagements with the world. Tilley therefore employs phenomenology not



**Figure 4** Tilley's annotated sketch plan of the western section of the Dorset cursus indicating some of the topographic and archaeological features which he encountered on his walk along the length of the monument (after Tilley 1994, Figure 5.20).

simply as a theoretical framework for understanding how people engage with the world around them, but as a methodology for accessing the experiences and interpretations of people in the past. In order to do so, however, he implicitly ascribes the material world a primordial reality, despite his cogent criticism of the Cartesian differentiation of subject and object.

This is of course problematic. To begin with, the form and character of the landscape are unlikely to have remained static across the millennia. Vegetation cover, for example, may have changed dramatically (Chapman and Gearey 2000; Cummings and Whittle 2003). The same landscape may look and feel quite different at different times of the year or different times of day (Cummings and Whittle 2003; cf. Criado Boado and Villoch Vázquez 2000, 193). Perhaps more importantly, as Tilley himself demonstrates so effectively elsewhere (1994, chapter 2), the material properties of landscape are not essential or ahistorical attributes but are themselves rendered 'visible' (that is, culturally recognizable and explicable) within particular social and ideological formations. As such, the meanings and values ascribed to particular elements of landscapes will affect people's experience and interpretations of these places (e.g. Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995; Schama 1995; Duncan 1996; Feld and Basso 1996; Darby 2000).

Thomas (2004, 143, 216–17) develops a useful line of argument based on his reading of Heidegger's work. He suggests that we can never grasp the material world in its pre-cultural form, because we ourselves are always socially embedded. As such, we recognize objects 'as' trees or mountains or tombs. Things appear to us in ways that are culturally constructed, so that the act of perception is also an act of interpretation (see also Ingold 1992, 46; Johnston 1998; Jones 2002). It is therefore unlikely that simply walking through a building, monument or landscape, or handling an artefact, will provide us with an authentic insight into the experiences of ancient people because those experiences are historically constituted. Thomas's focus (1996) on the temporality of being is useful here, as it allows him to explore the changing character and interpretation of the Neolithic landscape over time.

### Theories of knowledge

The issue of interpretation is therefore central to any consideration of phenomenological approaches in archaeology. It was argued above that one of the weaknesses of such approaches is that the patterns identified are not always adequately supported through the presentation and systematic analysis of data. However, even if it is possible to identify convincing relationships between particular monument classes and features of the landscape, or patterns in the placement of stones of different textures within a building, the meaning of these associations may be more difficult to access. Criado Boado and Villoch Vázquez (2000), for example, build on phenomenological approaches to consider the landscape context of prehistoric monuments in Galicia. They are at pains to analyse systematically the material to identify regularities in landscape setting. This, they argue, will allow them to avoid the subjectivity inherent in previous phenomenological approaches. However, although they demonstrate regular patterning in the location of monuments, they do not provide a detailed interpretation of this. It is therefore interesting that Tilley (2004a, 224) has recently argued that phenomenology is not in itself adequate to the task of interpreting archaeological material and he advocates a combination of phenomenological, structuralist and hermeneutic approaches.

Of course, there has been considerable debate regarding the epistemological status of archaeological knowledge, including the interpretations generated by phenomenological approaches. Tilley describes his interpretative accounts of ancient monuments and landscapes as a ‘creative response’ and a ‘metaphorical work of “art” for which we make no apology’ (2004a, 225). Elsewhere, excavation reports and landscape surveys have begun to include highly personalized accounts of the subjective experiences of those who carried them out (e.g. Bender, Hamilton and Tilley 1997; Hodder 2000a). The production of multiple narratives underlines the rich and polysemous nature of place (Bender 1998) and helps to counter criticisms which argue that phenomenology does not take account of the diversity of human experience. However, simply replacing the supposedly objective with the subjective does little to challenge post-Enlightenment dualisms (cf. Thomas 2004, 119). Describing our own embodied encounters with landscapes, monuments and objects tells us more about contemporary perceptions and preoccupations than it does about the past. This is certainly important, as a reflexive understanding of the origins of one’s own values and judgements is central to a more critical approach to archaeological interpretation. However, accounts which focus primarily on the archaeologist’s own experience without reflecting critically on the implications of this for the process of interpretation or for our knowledge of the past are likely to be of little interest to anyone other than their authors.

Such approaches are based on the argument that the role of our discipline cannot be the accurate reconstruction of a ‘real’ past whose material vestiges are left to us in the form of the archaeological record (Shanks and Tilley 1987; Barrett 1988; Bapty and Yates 1990). The past can only ever be re-created in the present and, as such, a critical understanding of contemporary experience is what should matter most (Shanks 1992). It has therefore been suggested that

the primary role of archaeology should be to engage with social and political issues in the present (Shanks and Tilley 1989), and that attempts to ‘know’ the past are misguided and ultimately doomed to failure. Phenomenological approaches are a useful addition to literature that focuses on the construction of knowledge in the contemporary world as they both challenge objectivist models of space and encourage the archaeologist to engage critically with the ways in which experiences of place are created. Tilley (2004a, 225), for example, argues that archaeological interpretation is carried out in and for the present. It is a pity, then, that he does not reflect on the political significance of his phenomenological work.

Of course, the ethical issues raised by relativist viewpoints have been hotly debated (e.g. Meskell 1995; Condon 1996). The development of hermeneutic approaches to interpretation that acknowledge the materiality of the past is one way in which ‘hyper-relativism’ has been countered (e.g. Hodder 1991; Johnsen and Olsen 1992; Wylie 1992; Jones 2002). For example, Tilley (2004a, 219) argues that although contemporary values influence our experience of ancient monuments, their materiality ensures that we cannot describe them in any way we please. Thomas employs a phenomenological perspective to develop these points further, describing materiality as a relational rather than an absolute attribute (1996, chapter 3; 2004, chapter 7; see also Jones 2002). He sees objects as situated within particular historical contexts constituted as networks of material, social and cultural links. In a similar way, our understanding of objects is affected by our own cultural milieu. This ensures that interpretation is neither boundless nor rigidly circumscribed; rather, archaeologists engage in dialogues with the archaeological record through which the past is re-envisaged and the present reconstructed. As such, Thomas (2004, 235–43; cf. Hill 1993; Jones 2002, 8) argues that it should be possible to engage in a process of contrast and comparison between present and past that will allow us to consider the possible difference of ancient societies and to denaturalize contemporary social and political conditions.

### **The individual and the self**

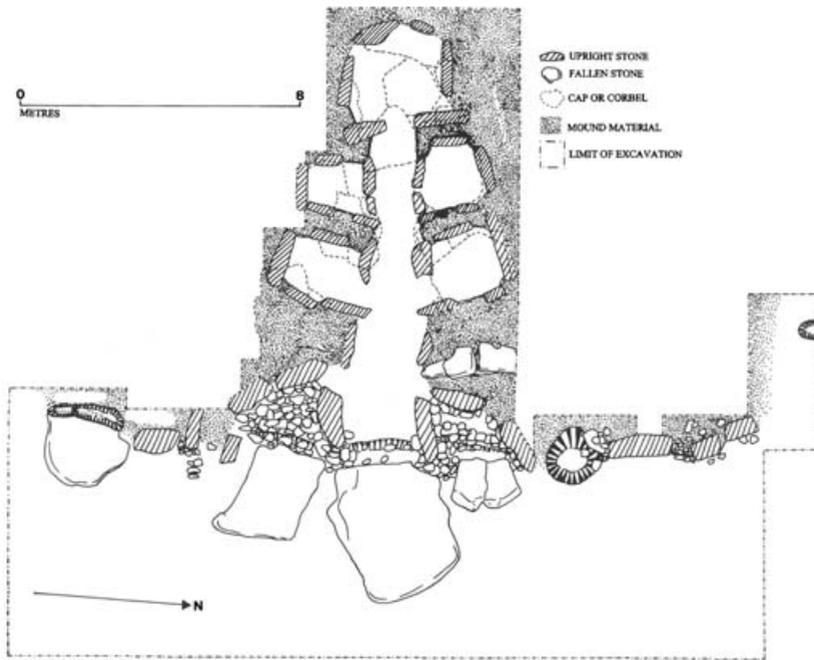
One of the most interesting debates provoked by the development of phenomenological approaches regards the significance of the individual in recent archaeological theory. The role of the active and knowledgeable human agent in social, economic and political change has been one of the primary tenets of postprocessual archaeology since its inception in the early 1980s (e.g. Hodder 1986, 6–10; 2000b). This was an important way of challenging the dehumanized systems theory of processual archaeology and of providing alternatives to environmental determinist approaches. However, drawing on phenomenology, Thomas (2002; 2004, chapter 6) has recently argued that a focus on the individual agent simply reproduces in the past concepts of the self specific to post-Enlightenment rationalist thinking. The liberal individualism of the 18th and 19th centuries represented the self as a bounded, homogeneous entity clearly distinguishable from others and possessing its own free will (e.g. Mauss 1985; Morris 1991; 1994, 16). It is argued that a focus on the individual homogenizes human experience and constructs only certain types of person as active agents because it ignores interpersonal relations

as sources of social power (Berggren 2000; Fowler 2000; Gero 2000). In much postprocessual writing, the agent is therefore implicitly male, white and Western. In contrast, Thomas (2002; 2004, 123–25) argues that in other societies, people's ability to act effectively is a product of their relationships with others. The self is not coterminous with the body but spills out to incorporate those people, objects and places that form part of one's personal biography (see also Brück 2001a; 2001b; Fowler 2001; 2002; 2004). As such, phenomenology's critique of dualisms such as self-other or subject-object has facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the variability of concepts of personhood.

Fowler (2000) has made a number of related points, arguing that the postprocessual interest in embodiment runs similar risks as it constructs the self purely in terms of the circumscribed attributes of the individual human body. Recent calls for an archaeology of emotion (e.g. Meskell 1996; 1998; Tarlow 2000) have been critiqued on similar grounds. It is suggested that a focus on emotion reflects the contemporary preoccupation with the subjective experience of a bounded individual (Fowler 2000; Thomas 2002; 2004, chapter 6). Fowler (2000) argues that postprocessual discussions of emotion have often involved the use of empathy. This, he suggests, is because such studies implicitly assume that we are dealing with essentially the same type of person – an individual – who reacts to events such as death in a uniform and predictable way. However, these claims have been challenged. Archaeologists writing about emotion and embodiment point out that recent work on the body in archaeology seeks to explore the culturally constructed character of embodied experience and concepts of selfhood (Meskell 1996, 11; Tarlow 2000). Emotion necessarily involves intersubjectivity, so that a focus on emotion in archaeology need not imply the presence of an 'individual' of the sort familiar from our own cultural context. Tarlow (2000) argues that there can be no place for empathy or biological essentialism in a mature archaeology of emotion. On the contrary, the understanding and experience of emotion varies cross-culturally and plays a central role in the construction of interpersonal relationships and the reproduction of social values.

This debate is interesting, as those who focus on the embodied individual in the past have similarly argued that phenomenological approaches result in the production of essentialist and anachronistic views of the self. Meskell (1996, 6–9), for example, argues that phenomenological accounts have tended to underplay the diversity of human experience by foregrounding the perspective of the white, heterosexual modern male. It has been suggested above that Tilley's work (1994; 1996; 1999, chapters 5 and 6; 2004a; 2004b) implicitly involves empathy, so that contemporary experiences of place are assumed to match those of ancient people. As we will see below, however, other writers (e.g. Thomas 1996; 2002; Fowler 2001; 2002) have used phenomenology in a more critical way to allow the boundary between self and other to be dissolved and radically different concepts of personhood to be proposed.

Nonetheless, I have suggested elsewhere that the dichotomy between subject and object or self and other has not been overcome entirely in phenomenological archaeology (Brück 2001a) and it is worth summarizing these arguments here. This has meant that, in certain ways, this body of work continues to project modern Western concepts of the person into the past.



**Figure 5** Plan of the chambers inside West Kennet long barrow, Wiltshire, showing how the architecture of the monument created segmented spaces (after J. Thomas 1991, Figure 9.5).

Phenomenological and related approaches have explored how architecture and landscape can be used to control the movement of people through space (e.g. J. Thomas 1988; 1991, 41–52; 1993a; 1996, 183–233; Pollard 1992; Kirk 1993; Richards 1993; Barrett 1994; Tilley 1994; Watson 2001). By shaping the paths that are to be followed, it is possible to create a vision of place that creates and sustains a particular perspective on the world. For example, it is suggested that the segmentation of space within Neolithic monuments both reflected and facilitated the structuring of society. Restricted access to the interiors of monuments is argued to have maintained interpersonal differences. The differentiation of multiple spaces mapped social difference onto the spatial order and facilitated the circumscription of meaning (Figure 5). In this way, people's embodied encounters with monuments and landscapes reproduced dominant ideologies.

There are a number of problems with such arguments, however. The idea that people could be controlled, ordered and categorized by restricting their movements in space constructs the self as an object that can be manipulated by others – usually by an emerging Neolithic elite (Brück 2001a). It represents certain categories of person as objects lacking in agency and others as knowledgeable, active and autonomous subjects. This reproduces the modern Western dichotomies between mind and body, subject and object, and imposes on the past the concepts of personhood on which post-Enlightenment liberal individualism is based (Jordanova 1980; Merchant 1980; Lloyd 1984; Bordo 1987). It is no coincidence, then, that the disciplined

and mechanical movement of Neolithic bodies around ceremonial monuments seems so similar to forms of bodily control during the 18th and 19th centuries documented by Foucault (1973 (1963); 1977 (1975); see Thomas 1993a).

Moreover, phenomenological approaches to prehistoric landscapes and monuments often fail to consider the potential for space to be used and interpreted in unintended and subversive ways (Brück 2001a). Both the idea of objectified persons whose movement through space is constrained and the notion of powerful individuals who control the ordering of space and the meanings ascribed to it rely on a model of the self as a static and bounded entity (cf. Hamilakis 2002, 122). However, anthropological studies of personhood indicate that this is not universal (e.g. Read 1955; Fajans 1985; Ito 1985; Strathern 1988; 1993; Morris 1994). Many societies possess a sociocentric or relational model of the person that constructs the self in terms of interpersonal relationships rather than in terms of the essential characteristics of a bounded individual. This means that those who exercise social power are themselves subject to the demands of others. Agency is not an intrinsic attribute of the bounded individual but a product of the network of social relationships that constitute the person. This is a point that Thomas (1996, chapter 3; 2002; 2004, 123–25) has also made, although, as I have argued elsewhere (Brück 2001a), he does not fully explore its implications in relation to the experience and interpretation of monumental space.

Of course, the self is not just the product of relationships between people. Things, places and events outside the limits of the human body often constitute important elements of the person (e.g. N. Thomas 1991; Weiner 1992; Feld and Basso 1996; Hoskins 1998). This means that it is never possible to control fully the experience and interpretation of space. People carry with them cultural values and attitudes, constructed outside of the monumental context, that provide them with the resources to produce alternative interpretations of place (cf. Deutsche 1996; Valentine 1996; Buchli 1999). This also underlines the fluidity of social identity (cf. Butler 1990; Brah 1996; Probyn 1996). Because the boundary between self and other is constantly shifting, identity can be reconstituted so that those who hold positions of authority at one moment may be challenged and undermined at other times. Although this issue has certainly been addressed in work drawing on phenomenology, it has primarily been explored in relation to contemporary and recent historical engagements with landscape (e.g. Bender 1998) rather than to prehistoric ways of experiencing and interpreting space.

A number of other authors have made similar points. Pluciennik (2002a, 174), for example, argues that phenomenological approaches which involve the detailed description of one's own engagement with a monument 'fall into the trap of reproducing a particular type of contemporary, subjective, individual, highly self-conscious and intellectualized experience as a template for interpreting the past'. Meskell (1996, 6–7) and Hodder (1999, 136), on the other hand, have argued that phenomenological approaches produce depersonalized accounts of monuments in which the role and perspective of those who encountered these places is underplayed. The focus on how the ordering of space facilitates the reproduction of dominant discourses means that the agency of non-elite categories of person is obscured and results in the

projection of contemporary forms of power into the past (Meskell 1996, 6–7). Meskell suggests that we need to investigate the lived experiences of particular individuals and to consider how they actively and creatively shaped their own lives. The response of phenomenological writers to these points has already been outlined above.

### **Archaeologies of inhabitation**

It has been pointed out that phenomenological approaches have tended to focus on ceremonial monuments, and the landscapes in which they were set, to the exclusion of other elements of social practice (Gosden 1996, 25; Hind 2004a, 39). This results in a categorical distinction of the ritual from the secular, a classification of activities that is more characteristic of the modern Western world than of many other societies (Brück 1999). Prehistoric monuments are of course particularly amenable to analysis involving embodied engagement with architectural form because substantial above-ground elements often survive today. Sites such as chambered tombs, henges, stone circles, cursus monuments and round barrows have all been considered by those writing within this genre. Routine activities, on the other hand, have not been examined in such detail. This is partly because such studies have to date focused on the north-west European Neolithic, where monuments are more visible archaeologically than domestic architecture. Related approaches have, however, been applied to prehistoric houses in Britain (e.g. Hingley 1990; Richards 1993; Parker Pearson and Richards 1994). These have included analysis of patterns of movement around these buildings, as well as discussion of the sensory characteristics of domestic architecture, for example the location of areas of light and dark.

Other authors have sought to redress the balance by developing ‘archaeologies of inhabitation’ which build on phenomenological approaches to consider the significance of day-to-day practice in the constitution of social relationships (e.g. Barrett 1989; 1994; Gosden 1994; Pollard 2000; Edmonds and Seaborne 2001; Gerritsen 2003; Chadwick 2004b). Drawing in particular on work by Tim Ingold (e.g. 1986; 1993; 2000), it is argued that embedded, sensual inhabitation of meaningful landscapes plays a central role in the construction of social identity. The landscapes of routine practice sediment themselves into our being through their very familiarity; our intimate engagement with their colours, textures and associations renders them part of ourselves. In common with explicitly phenomenological approaches, such writings underline the importance of ‘dwelling’. They too consider movement as a significant element in the experiences of landscape on which narratives of identity are based. Here, however, it is regular patterns of movement that are the focus of interest (e.g. Barrett 1994; Edmonds 1999; Pollard 1999; Hind 2004b) – the herding of cattle to water each day, journeys to the coast to collect flint or visits to kinsfolk in the next valley. It is these routine practices that create embedded links between people, place and identity. Such material engagements occur within a meaningful social world, in which the traditions bound up with particular locations provide people with the cultural resources and practical knowledge to act effectively. Despite the danger that such ‘dwelling perspectives’ could invoke reductive and romanticized

conceptions of identity in which blood and soil become linked (cf. Wickstead forthcoming), authors writing from this perspective have retained a resolutely critical stance on the politics of identity by invoking cultural rather than essentialist representations of landscape.

The evocative nature of recent archaeologies of inhabitation underlines the rather depopulated character of certain phenomenological accounts. When Tilley (1994, 173–96) describes his walk along the Dorset Cursus, for example, there are only three actors involved in the scene: the author, the cursus and the physical landscape in which the monument is set (cf. Hamilakis, Pluciennik and Tarlow 2002, 9). Of course, Neolithic people's experience of this monument is likely to have been very different; they might have encountered the monument in the company of kinsfolk, neighbours, strangers, animals and objects and to the sound of stories, songs and talk. Writers such as Edmonds (1999) have attempted to address this problem by creating richly textured narratives drawing on a range of evidence from both within and without the monumental context and employing fictional accounts to reanimate these now-silent places. As Edmonds (1999) points out, people's experience of a location is likely to have varied depending on the context of their engagement with it. People may have come together at a monument to arrange marriages, quarry flint, breed livestock or exchange ceramics; the understanding of such activities is likely to have been informed by the wider social and economic context of these and related practices outside of the monument itself. As such, it is important that we firmly embed these places in the wider landscapes of routine of which they were once a part.

One way in which this might be achieved is by breaking down the boundaries between people, animals and objects. Thomas (1996; 1998; 2002) attempts to do just this (but see Patton 1996) and it is no coincidence that of the various writers who have drawn on phenomenology, he has been one of the more successful in considering both ritual and routine activities. As we have already seen, he employs a range of anthropological parallels to argue that non-Western societies do not always make a categorical distinction between self and other or subject and object. He suggests that the circulation of fragments of objects and parts of human bodies within the same networks of exchange, and depositional practices which treated people and things in similar ways, indicate that there was no strict boundary between people and objects in the Neolithic (Figure 6). Related ideas have recently been explored by a number of other authors who have argued that in particular historical contexts animals and artefacts may have been considered sentient beings who played active roles in the social world (e.g. Gosden and Marshall 1999; Brück 2001b; Fowler 2001; 2002; 2004; Pluciennik 2002b; Conneller 2004; Pollard 2004). Where this was the case, other things may have been seen as part of the self so that personhood could extend beyond the physical boundaries of the human body.

Such discussions may help us to relocate monuments within the wider network of links that rendered them meaningful (Brück 2001a). It suggests that both people and places were constituted in relational terms so that monuments cannot be divorced from social context or considered as static material entities that create uniform experiences of place. Related points have



**Figure 6** Thomas (1996, chapter 6) suggests that objects such as the Folkton drums may have been considered animate by Late Neolithic communities (after Thomas 1996, Figure 6.8).

been made by Thomas (1993b, 29; 1996) who has argued for an intensely historical, fluid and shifting experience of monuments in the Neolithic, although as I have argued elsewhere (Brück 2001a), his work has focused not on the interpretations of different categories of person, but on changing conceptions over time.

### Conclusion

In recent years, phenomenology has made a significant contribution to archaeological theory, particularly in Britain. The argument that the world around us is experienced not as abstract two-dimensional space but from the perspective of the embedded and sensual human body provides a useful critique of the Cartesian modes of representation that have dominated the discipline. Amongst other things, this has encouraged valuable reanalyses of the architecture and landscape settings of various different categories of monument. Of course, some of the approaches employed are not new. Studies of intervisibility, for example, have been carried out by many archaeologists (e.g. Renfrew 1979; Fraser 1983). Research on the role of sight, sound, smell and touch in the built environment has been undertaken within a processual interpretative framework (Sanders 1990) and it is perhaps no surprise that this latter work sees the human body as a universal linking present and past – something that also implicitly underpins certain phenomenological approaches.

Phenomenology facilitates the identification of relationships that may have been considered significant in the past, for example the link between round barrows and coombes (dry valleys) proposed for the Dorset Ridgeway (Tilley 2004b). However, it cannot tell us what those relationships might have meant.

Some writers have suggested that embodied engagement with the landscape in the present provides an insight into past experiences and interpretations of place. For the reasons outlined in this paper, however, I would argue that this cannot be the case. Nonetheless, phenomenology can encourage us to think imaginatively about the social and political implications of spatial layout and landscape setting and in this it has been very successful.

Perhaps one of the most productive strands of phenomenological writing within archaeology has been the deconstruction of the dualistic thinking that is a product of post-Enlightenment rationalism. This has facilitated a radical reconceptualization of the nature of materiality and the relationship between people and artefacts. Critical reassessment of the dichotomies between subject and object, self and other, nature and culture have allowed writers to reconsider the social significance of landscape and to explore concepts of the person that are very different to modern Western models of the individual. These points also underline the fundamentally hermeneutic nature of human engagement with the world. Only by seeing objects as inanimate can we adhere to a model according to which humans impose meaning on a passive and pre-cultural universe. If, on the other hand, we recognize that artefacts, buildings, monuments and landscapes not only affect us but make us who we are, then our engagement with the archaeological record is necessarily a dialogue in which both archaeologists and the axes, houses or burials we study are created and transformed (Jones 2002; Tilley 2004a, 18). Phenomenology, then, forms a significant element of a hermeneutical archaeology and, as such, it certainly merits the interest and discussion it has attracted.

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### Note

<sup>1</sup> Peterson (2003) has remarked on the use of similar devices by William Stukeley, an 18th-century English antiquarian; these include three-dimensional 'prospects' of monuments in their landscape contexts as well as drawings showing the views from a site. He argues that such modes of representation can be seen as a product of pre-Enlightenment conceptions of landscape.

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