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A phenomenology of landscape

A crisis in British landscape archaeology?

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ABSTRACT

Recent criticism of the accuracy of the claimed observations on monument location by workers employing a ‘phenomenological’ approach to landscape archaeology in Britain has exposed failures in the way their particular approach has been employed to explain the choices made in the siting of certain Neolithic monuments. This article explains why such errors of record may have occurred and re-examines the ways in which the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger can offer a more positive contribution to our understanding of the historical context of the creation of these monuments.

KEYWORDS

landscape • megaliths • Neolithic • phenomenology



■ INTRODUCTION

The publication of Tilley's *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Paths, Places and Monuments* (1994) established an archaeological way of interpreting monuments in their landscape settings that has gathered adherents and helped to inspire a considerable amount of recent fieldwork in British archaeology (cf. Brück, 2005). The value of some of that work has now been questioned (Fleming, 1999, 2005, 2006) and to date the critique by Fleming has only been briefly addressed (Cummings and Whittle, 2004: 69; Cummings et al., 2002). However, if phenomenological approaches (whatever we might mean by this) to landscape archaeology are to develop then the problems raised by Fleming will require a rather fuller consideration. This article attempts to contribute to such a consideration and it proposes that Fleming's critique is convincing, for, in largely failing to grasp the power of phenomenological analyses, these various landscape approaches have failed to establish a credible body of historical knowledge.

Phenomenology is the investigation of how the world is given to us, and thus the conditions that are necessary for consciousness. In its full and diverse philosophical development phenomenology is abstract in the principles that it develops (in other words, these principles are designed to have a general applicability), it is of fundamental importance to understanding the nature of Being (to which we shall return), and it aspires to be analytical. Archaeological studies, however, have avoided the technical aspects of this philosophy by simply using the term to label a particular approach towards the landscapes under study. That approach is rather more clearly defined by what it rejects than by its adoption of a coherent philosophy, and this rejection takes two forms.

It first rejects the notion that the mechanisms of history are reducible to a series of general processes that operate cross-culturally. Instead, historical processes are viewed as arising in ways that are culturally and context specific. Processual archaeology's claim to seek the laws (or high level generalizations) of historical development are therefore regarded with suspicion (and with some justification, considering the seeming failure of such laws to materialize); and the idea that specific historical cases may be reduced to general conditions operating according to certain predictable paths of development is criticized for being an unwarranted and reductionist adoption of determinate explanations. Any attempt to move away from accounts involving such historical generalities raises, however, the question of how history is to be written if not as the unfolding of certain general processes, and the answer has tended to involve foregrounding the role of human agency. Structural conditions, such as various social and economic institutions, are now treated not so much as determining the course of history, but as being reproduced by humans although not (to

misquote the oft repeated aphorism of Marx) under the conditions of their own choosing. Human agency, situated within certain given and specific conditions, is therefore taken to replace the role of abstractly formulated models of social and economic structures as the key force in the making of history.

The second move towards staking out a phenomenological position is made by rejecting the methodological consensus of a scientific archaeology. In recognizing that historical narratives are a cultural product of the present, we are also invited to recognize that they must be implicated in the making of our own contemporary world. The methodological programmes that seek to legitimate historical knowledge by the application of established and seemingly unchallengeable procedures of analysis are arguably, therefore, also contributing towards maintaining the current political and social status quo. This position arises from earlier critiques of archaeological practice (cf. Shanks and Tilley, 1987) and has resulted, in some cases, in caricaturing mechanisms of objective observation and scientific rationality as an underhand attempt to appropriate access to the past by the operation of established disciplinary procedures, which fail to capture the necessarily subjective and multi-vocal sources of inspiration employed by history's own human agents.

The latter claims against objectivity have been rehearsed at length by others on many different occasions, and we will not try the reader's patience by reviewing them further here. What we must do, however, is to note that the objections raised by Fleming are grounded on what we might hope are the relatively uncontentious assumptions that the evidence *can* be agreed upon and *can* be used to evaluate claims about the past. Fleming's first objection questions the empirical claims made by Tilley and by Cummings (Cummings and Whittle, 2004) in their observations concerning the location of Neolithic and some Bronze Age monuments, and the generalizations thus drawn from these observations (Fleming, 1999, 2005). It was by revisiting the monuments discussed by Tilley and Cummings that Fleming found credulity strained: it was 'difficult to look students in the eye, keep a straight face, and explain, on site, how the ideas of Tilley (and now Cummings) are supposed to work' (Fleming, 2005: 930). The second objection raised by Fleming is a direct consequence of this methodological failure, in which he not only doubts the possibility of ever verifying claims made about the nature of the past based on Tilley's and Cummings's work, but also extends this observation to embrace the more impressionistic writings on landscape history offered by Edmonds (1999, 2004; Edmonds and Seaborne, 2001; Fleming, 2006). Our concern in this article rests mainly with the question of field observation and the concomitant more general conclusions that flow from this.



■ THE MEGALITHIC ENCOUNTER

A number of recent studies explore the ways the monumental architecture of the European Neolithic intervened and continues to intervene in the ways landscapes may be viewed. This work includes the detailed consideration of contemporary landscape encounters as part of archaeological enquiry (Fraser, 2004), and claims that a developing built environment contributed to the conditions of possibility for social change (Barrett, 1994; Richards, 2005; Thomas, 1999). However, we focus here on the work of Tilley and Cummings for two reasons: they employ the field data they have collected to make particular claims about the motivations that guided the original builders of these monuments (claims that we argue are unsustainable); and their field data have been questioned by Fleming's failure to be able to repeat the observations that they have recorded. The central feature of these data is claimed visual relationships between the monuments and other landscape features. The problems raised by the assumptions that Tilley and Cummings employ enable us to reassert the strengths of Heidegger's approach to phenomenology as one of historical enquiry.

Megalithic tombs are amongst the earliest and best-known examples of monumental architecture in Western European prehistory. Originally explained as resulting from the spread of religious ideas emanating from the Mediterranean, research over the last 40 or so years has now placed their development firmly in the context of the indigenous adoption of early agriculture and its relationship with pre-existing hunter-gatherer economies. In these more recent studies the construction and use of megaliths are normally seen as contributing to the systemic adjustments of social and economic organization that facilitated the introduction of agriculture (c.f. Bradley, 1998; Sherratt, 1995). Megalithic tombs provide a major theme for Tilley's analysis of Neolithic landscapes (1994: 76–142; see also 1996: 119–246) and the surviving monuments of Wales are the subject matter of Cummings' research (Cummings and Whittle, 2004; but see also Cummings, 2002; Fowler and Cummings, 2003).

Brück has recently suggested that the phenomenological turn taken by some British prehistorians equates with the desire to 'describe the character of human experience, specifically the ways in which we apprehend the material world through directed intervention'. Given that materiality is 'at the heart of archaeological endeavour', and because human perception and understanding of the material world, as an embodied engagement, is 'constitutive of existence' (Brück, 2005: 46), then we might assume that historical enquiry should indeed address the ways human existence is historically constituted through material engagement. This may seem challenging, but it is not a particularly contentious aim. Why, then, might things have gone so seriously wrong?

Let us take the central concern of archaeology to be the understanding of how humanity has been historically constituted in its various ways through different conditions of material practice. This looks like a rather more complex programme than that of Brück's desire to place *materiality* 'at the heart of archaeological endeavour', but we certainly share with her the emphasis she places on humanity as a product of a material engagement. As we shall see, this is a vitally important position to defend. The archaeological programme may now be described from an ontological aspect that acknowledges the reality of these historical conditions, and from an epistemological aspect – that is, to understand how our contemporary knowledge of such real historical conditions may be established. The recent phenomenological stance in archaeology has been one that treats both of these as questions of subjectivity: ontologically, historical realities must involve the subjects' experiences of and working with a certain kind of materiality; epistemologically, archaeology seeks ways to characterize those various historical conditions through our own subjective engagement with the material record. It is this latter emphasis on what might be termed a 'subjective epistemology' – the belief that our own embodied experiences of landscapes and monuments must reveal to us something of the experiences of the people who once inhabited those same places in the past – that we believe to be problematic.

■ THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ISSUE

We have already hinted that an uncertain eclecticism characterizes what are termed phenomenological approaches in archaeology. Tilley's liberal usage of 'Being-in-the world' and '*Dasein*' in *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (1994) – a book the author later describes as '[setting] out the theoretical basis for a phenomenological approach to the landscape' (2005: 206) – implies his intellectual debt to Heideggerian phenomenology. However, in the more recently published summary (2005), Tilley's regard for the phenomenology of Husserl is also made clear. Important differences nevertheless exist between the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, and we would suggest that this lack of precision in the chosen approach shields the entire phenomenological programme in archaeology from any scrutiny of its theoretical basis. Building on Fleming's critique will only be possible when we are able to identify more clearly the theoretical principles that underlie the phenomenological approach that is being taken, thus allowing us to consider whether the archaeological use of this philosophy has been appropriate.

Tilley's and Cummings' phenomenology of landscape, used as an interpretative methodology, might be summarized in the following way:



- 1 The archaeological record cannot be understood without a human presence. Meaning arises in a human engagement with material conditions.
- 2 The body is the medium through which this engagement occurs.
- 3 By using his or her own body as the medium of engagement, the archaeologist can encounter a past Being-in-the-world, and, in doing so, grasp the meaning of the archaeological record.

The first and second of these statements accord very broadly with the phenomenology of Heidegger (1962[1927])¹ and Merleau-Ponty (1962[1945]),² and represent a theoretical position regarding material culture and human engagement that has gained wide acceptance within archaeology well beyond the phenomenological approaches considered here. It is, however, the third statement which contains the central principle of phenomenological approaches to landscape, and which must be considered further, and this consideration will colour our reading of all the statements listed above.

The definition of phenomenology adopted by Tilley seems simple enough: 'phenomenology involves the understanding and description of things as they are experienced by *a subject*' (1994: 12, our emphasis). This 'subject' is one that is consciously aware of its surroundings, as is evidenced by the way in which Tilley observes the landscape, looking for clues which may provide him with the 'meanings' of the past. The crux of the problem we have with this work is captured by the claim that the subject *pre-exists* experience, and is captured by the following statement:

Being-in-the-world resides in a process of *objectification* in which people *objectify* the world by setting themselves *apart* from it. This results in the creation of a gap, a distance in space. To be human is both to create this distance between the self and that which is beyond and to attempt to bridge this distance through a variety of means. (Tilley, 1994: 12, our emphasis)

We cannot help but wonder how Being-in-the-world can be characterized as a distancing *from* the world or as Tilley expresses it, as a 'setting . . . apart'. The analytical distinction we take from our own reading of Heidegger³ is that which must be drawn between Being and the historical states of being, the latter involving a subject's thoughts and linguistic expressions. Heidegger asks: what must exist for us to be the latter kinds of knowledgeable beings that we are? The implication is that our knowledge of the world, the historical state of our being a subject, must be made possible by the more subterranean and foundational condition of Being itself, and it is the question of the latter that Heidegger believed philosophy had forgotten to investigate.

This observation is not as obscure as it might at first sound: it demands that the subject must be constituted historically and it enquires how this is

achieved. The subject cannot, therefore, be taken as the given base-line upon which particular historical conditions are constructed. It was to such a supposedly given subject that Descartes turned in claiming that we know we exist because we are self-aware, a state made possible through the existence of some kind of inner self. Heidegger breaks with this Cartesian tradition and exposes such a given, taken for granted 'self' as an expression of our forgetting the more fundamental question: how is such a knowing being possible? Today we might be tempted to answer this question in terms of a simple biological determinacy: it is possible by virtue of the biological structure of our senses and our brain that give us the world that we know (cf. Dennett, 1995).⁴ However, the relevance of Heidegger's position remains: the conditions for knowledge have to be constructed; they are given neither by the Cartesian focus upon the soul nor by Dennett's focus on the biological body and the brain, rather they are constructed by Being-in-the-world. The 'soul' for Descartes and 'body' for Dennett both appear to comprehend their worlds by 'taking in' and synthesizing the sense data they receive. Being-in-the-world on the other hand is a condition of enormous vulnerability, not a process of contemplation but a 'thrown-ness' into a world that exists simply as it is, and which can only ever be apprehended by virtue of the partiality of a particular engagement; this is the world as it is for that Being.

Encountering Tilley's description of the 'subject' as conscious and ever objectifying is therefore to encounter a break with the phenomenology of Heidegger rather than its adoption. In attempting to clear his or her mind of the preconceptions of our own age, which might be supposed to hinder access to the Neolithic state of being, and then consciously looking around, observing the surrounding landscape and its relationship to the monument in an attempt to encounter that monument as it would have been in the past, the archaeologist is not practising a Heideggerian engagement with the world: such phenomenological approaches to the landscape contain, in fact, an epistemological attitude similar to that which Heidegger was attempting to get beyond in formulating his own ideas of phenomenology. It is not a matter of the conscious, objectifying experience of an observer that Heidegger sought, but rather the physical working upon the world as given, a labour that creates consciousness itself.

Heidegger's formation of how subjects emerge by taking the world as it is, by entering upon it, is illustrated in the following commentary:

Interpretation is the 'appropriation' (*Zueignung*) of equipment in which one makes the totality one's own. This interpretation always involves taking 'something as something'; the hammer is encountered *as* a hammer, the nails are encountered *as* nails. When Heidegger says that something is encountered '*as* something', he does not mean that we have consciously identified a thing and predicated some property to it. The '*as*' of interpretation is 'prepredicative'. 'In interpreting' Heidegger says, 'we do



not, so to speak, throw a “signification” over some naked thing which is present at hand, we do not stick a value on it’. Rather it is the totality of the equipmental context as an interconnected field – a totality understood in advance – that is articulated into an as-structure in interpretation. (Guignon, 1983: 96)

From the perspective of Heideggerian phenomenology the way that humans experience and grasp the world is by encountering objects as they ‘just exist’ or are ‘just used’ within an everyday context. This attitude towards objects, in which they are approached simply ‘as’ – as they are – rather than consciously being theorized about, is referred to as ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*). By using what we find to hand, we begin slowly to grasp the completeness of things from the accumulation of partial and momentary experiences. If an observer were to theorize about the world from the detached perspective achieved by ‘setting themselves apart’, then the authenticity of things would be replaced by perspectives from which their completeness would never be recognized in any authentic way. Only by being in the world, by grasping the tool, does its authenticity become apparent. It was this emphasis on the working with things as they are that resulted in Heidegger’s idealization of the given practicalities of the peasant’s existence working on the land, and his suspicion of technological developments as precisely a form of distancing through an intervention between Being and the world.

Now, of course, objects are objectified as ‘things’ or in terms of their properties; and the world is, at times, approached from the attitude of present-at-hand (*vorhanden*), as an object of inspection.⁵ However, for Heidegger, the ready-to-hand was primordial. As Guignon (2006: 10) puts it, ‘the present-at-hand items taken as basic by traditional theorizing (for instance, physical objects and their causal relations) are derivative from and parasitic on the world understood as a context of involvements directed towards accomplished things’. In other words, present-at-hand is a *derivative* mode of being which should not be mistaken with the significant mode of Being underlying all entities; it is, rather, ready-to-hand which constitutes ‘our practical understanding of dealing with equipment, “being-with” other human beings, and “in-each-case-mineness”, the relation to and concern for our own selves that we are and have to be’ (Frede, 2006: 58).

The subject who finds him/herself as a centred being, in the way that Descartes described that centering upon the ‘inner self’, and who might, as Tilley has it, have objectified ‘the world by setting themselves apart from it’, is not the condition of Being-in-the-world but projects away from that condition. The engagement with things as they are, and not their contemplation, allows the partial perspective of experience to begin to build a particular completeness in understanding the ways that things work. It is on this grounding of the experience of things in themselves that a theorization of the world becomes possible. The origins of this self reflection therefore lie in a form of disclosure, an opening out of understanding.

■ LANDSCAPE IMPLICATIONS

What is it, then, that Tilley, Cummings and Whittle claim to have discovered in their various analyses of megalithic tombs, and how might a closer alignment with the phenomenology of Heidegger help us to disentangle the ways these claims have rendered themselves so vulnerable to the critique of Fleming? The central insight that will help us resolve this question will be to recognize that any theorization which seeks to explain the appearance of things as a coherent reality can only arise from the way we move to grasp the world, and that the latter is based on the real physical engagement of Being-in-the-world, and not by intellectual contemplation.

Megalithic tombs have previously been used to demonstrate the sequences of their construction; the kinds of burial deposits that have accumulated within them; their cultural associations; and their possible roles in landscape organization. Through their own fieldwork, however, Tilley and Cummings have sought a different perspective: their fieldwork has aimed to reveal how the tombs might have been perceived in the landscape at the time of their original construction and they appear to assume that this will provide us with a clue as to the motivations for the construction of these monuments. The argument would appear to go something like this: human action is goal orientated and the actions of the tomb builders were orientated to ensure that the constructed tomb resulted in, among other things, certain visual consequences. The original motivations for construction were therefore manifest in the consequences of construction. Thus it is proposed that if the tomb marked the landscape in a certain way, a marking that we can still recognize today, then this marking expresses the explicit and meaningful intention of the builders.

We now arrive at the problem that Tilley, Cummings, and Whittle have created for themselves. They treat their encounter with a megalithic tomb in its particular landscape setting as a source of knowledge, where today's visitor's perspective of the landscape around the tomb offers a somewhat distant glimpse of the source of landscape understanding that was available to the Neolithic inhabitant. At the same time they accept that the action of the tomb's builders was similarly knowledgeable with, for example, the choice of the tomb's location (as in 'where should we build our tomb?') demanding a knowledgeable and strategic selection from a number of possible alternatives. What guided that selection? Tilley and Cummings both presume that location was determined by the visual perspective that the finished monument was intended to provide: in other words the perspective was pre-planned. But how does anyone know? As Fleming points out, there are innumerable reasons why a location may have been chosen, all of them highly esoteric and leaving absolutely no clue to any subsequent observer. Tilley and Cummings seek to reveal the hidden motivation of the builders in two ways. The first is to claim that if there is



an observable regularity in tomb location with reference to some other type of landscape feature, then such regularity is unlikely to be the work of chance and more likely to be the result of strategic choice. The second embraces the idea that the meaning of a signifier (the tomb) is given by whatever it refers to or gestures towards. In other words, if the tomb is seen to gesture towards another landscape feature by, for example, being aligned upon that feature, then the meaning recovered by a visitor to the tomb who observes that relationship is an adequate recognition of the builders' original intention. We might not be able to decipher what the relationship meant, but we will recognize the correlation between the tomb and various landscape features as an encoding which was intentionally written and was intended to be read. Both these claims that the motivation for a tomb's location was written into the landscape in ways that are still recoverable today are the root cause of the problems identified by Fleming. We doubt that Tilley and Cummings have sought to deceive their readers. Why should they, given the ease with which their claims may be checked (as Fleming has demonstrated)? Their problem is that they have believed that the answer to the landscape puzzle of tomb location must be encoded in the way the monuments relate spatially and visually to other landscape features because they further believe that such relationships were an expression of the strategic decisions of the builders. Consequently, they have read the landscapes in this way, and they have done so with what might be most generously regarded as an unwarranted optimism. In some cases they may have been led to see what does not really exist; in other cases they have claimed any form of correlation as significant without any idea of how such a claim might be validated.

We are now some way removed from the insight we have gleaned from Heidegger. The tomb is treated not as the labour of an engagement with material realities, the move through a pre-intellectualized state of Being-in-the-world, but rather it has become the result of acts of a pre-planned execution, an intellectual project designed with specific intention. Building for Tilley and Cummings is not the means to discover order from the world, but rather it is the imposition of order upon the world. If this approach has its roots in phenomenology then it lies not with Heidegger's *Being and Time* but with the work of Husserl.

Heidegger was originally a student of Husserl and the latter is generally regarded as the founder of contemporary phenomenology. It was, however, by a radical rejection of Husserlian thought that Heidegger came to formulate his own phenomenological programme (Smith and Smith, 1995). Husserl constantly revised and expanded his philosophy and adopted various approaches in different works, and we would be reticent in assigning any archaeological approach to Husserlian phenomenology. However, Tilley (2005) has recently hinted that it is to Husserl's phenomenology that the theoretical basis of his phenomenological approaches to landscape owes

its debt, and this guidance does allow us to draw out the distinctions in approach that are our concern here.

Husserl's definition of the science of phenomenology is that it is the study of 'the essence of conscious experience, especially intentional experience' (1972[1931]). Central to Husserl's phenomenological method is the detached attitude of consciousness by which objects are experienced (Smith and Smith, 1995). This detached attitude is achieved by means of the 'phenomenological reduction' which Heidegger (1968[1954]), in rejecting the concept, described as the methodological procedure that led phenomenological vision from 'the natural attitude' thrown into the actual world of things and persons, to 'the transcendental attitude' of consciousness and its detached experiences, in which objects are constituted as correlates of consciousness. Husserl's phenomenological reduction supposedly enables the subject to free itself from prejudices and maintain the intellectual detachment of an observer. This is exactly the move that, as we have already noted, Tilley mistakenly assigns to Being-in-the-world. In addition to the confusion and false expectations that this raises for the archaeological field worker, a second problem is now introduced: the 'transcendental attitude' is an a-historical condition.

If it really were to be possible for archaeologists to suppress all prejudice and to experience, through 'the rich sensuous qualities that we know to be characteristic of actual human experience and dwelling in the world' (Tilley, 2005: 203),⁶ the world as it was seen in the Neolithic, then we would have to assume that these experiences have somehow escaped the confines of any specific historical context. The notion of Being-in-the-world may indeed be abstract in the claim that is made for its general applicability, but it is historically constituted by virtue of its move towards actually existing conditions encountered from a specific emotional perspective. These 'things in themselves' were ultimately grasped from a perspective or place of entry upon the world, and perspectives are partial and situated; they are prejudicial and historically specific. Consequently, the path between the pre-expectations by which the qualities of the world are first encountered and the means by which those qualities are set within an intellectually communicable order is one which is not only historical in terms of its temporal displacement from our own experiences, but it is historical by virtue of being one of the processes by which history is itself made.

■ A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE MEGALITHIC LANDSCAPE

We suggest that Heidegger's phenomenology significantly revises the basis of archaeological enquiry by making human agency the object of history and by questioning the traditional handling of the relationship between that



agency and the material conditions of its existence. The case may be developed by considering how Tilley and Cummings have themselves sought to shift the focus of archaeological analysis.

Traditional archaeological enquiry would have had us treat monuments such as megalithic tombs as the representations of certain processes involving their building and use, processes which contribute to the ways archaeologists have characterized the Neolithic. As has long been recognized, this is a very weak characterization of history, describing only what may have happened without telling us anything about the reasons why such monuments may have been constructed or used. The struggle to establish an adequate archaeological explanation for the emergence of certain kinds of material conditions, such as the megalithic landscape of the Neolithic, has long been sought by reference to the forces that are assumed to have determined or motivated the organization of human activity at that time. Simplifying greatly, those forces have been divided between 'external' forces that determined human adaptation to the prevailing conditions of the time, and those 'internal' forces that arose from the conceptual schemes that motivated human action. In both cases the human subject has seemingly remained constant through time, either responding to changing determinate conditions or being driven to express differently structured conceptual categories.

Tilley and Cummings have begun to shift the terms of this debate. The agents that drove the histories in which they are interested were those agents who sought out ways of seeing the world through the constructions of monuments that fixed visual relationships between places: an architecture through which the landscape might have been viewed. However, Heidegger teaches that the subjects that define human agency cannot be treated as if they were in some way transcendental to history; instead, they must be greeted as the diverse and emergent products of history itself. If we are to follow this reasoning, then the archaeologist's task can no longer be to explain the creation of cultural variability by reference to the motivations or actions of a timeless human subjectivity – a subjectivity that we are supposedly able to share across some six millennia and the common basis of which we can employ to interpret our own fieldwork observations. This throws open the question of the relationship between human subjectivity and the development of material culture, both of which must now be treated as constructed in history rather than the latter being explained as the construction of the former.

The human subjects of any epoch grasp an understanding of their place in relation to others, and they have an agency that is capable of deploying available resources towards some material effect. In this context, material conditions (such as megalithic architecture) may have been employed to represent or to give substance to certain ideas of conceptual order, as in the relationship existing between a community of the dead and one of the

living. This much is commonly accepted in a great deal of current archaeological literature, but it remains, in our view, a partial version of history. It simply describes history in terms of a sequence of culturally varied conditions, whilst failing to expose that which made possible a particular kind of subjective being in the first place. The underlying question is, therefore, to see how a world was brought into view and how it became possible to speak of that world in a certain way, in other words how a subjectivity could be established. To recognize the form of a cultural expression is all very well, but to enquire as to how it was possible to bring that cultural expression into existence is the more profound question. Our response to this question, informed as we understand it by Heidegger, places emphasis on a pre-conceptual condition in which a direct engagement with the world as given (but an engagement that was none the less necessarily pitched from a particular perspective) drew upon the phenomena that were encountered as ready-to-hand to reveal the possible categorization of things. This labour created, in Heidegger's terms, the clearing from whence the subject was able to draw into view a theory of how the world might be.

Our expectation is therefore that the megalithic tomb can neither stand as the characteristic representation of a period, nor can the motivations for its construction be sought in the consequences of its existence. In place of these conventional assumptions it seems more than likely that by making the monument a transition was marked between people's engagement with the phenomena of the world and the means by which a conceptual order of that world might be expressed. In constructing a megalithic tomb participants engaged with material conditions and made choices – regarding location, the selection of raw materials, and the form of the architecture – and by making these choices at every stage of construction an understanding of how the world is, or how the world might be, came to be realized. The act of *locating* cannot be reduced to one of representation where location choice is treated as a theorization of a world view re-presented as a form of landscape architecture. Rather it was an act of *realization* in which a ready-to-hand engagement with the material led to the recognition of what had been achieved.

In describing the location of the tombs of Ffostyll North and South in the Black Mountains in south-east Wales, Cummings et al. continue to claim that:

... the primary concern of the builders was to orientate the long axes of the cairns ... so that the landscape around the monument would be asymmetrical. ... [T]he long axis of each monument seems to emphasize points of transition *between* contrasting parts of the landscape, and often where the nature of the view changed from open to restricted. (2002: 61, original emphasis)

But the perceptions of 'asymmetry' and 'transition' are founded on the existence of each tomb rather than on an existence prior to their construction.



We cannot justifiably trace back from the reality given by the existence of the tomb to a motivation in its construction: time's arrow is not reversible. What becomes historically important is the realization that, by the acts of building these monuments a new perspective by which the landscape might be objectified, represented, and spoken about, became possible.

We have now been able to establish a historical position that charts the development of an emergent subjectivity and materiality; one that is fully commensurate with the archaeological evidence as it stands. In her accounts of building works in the British Neolithic, McFadyen (2006) has consistently questioned the assumption that such works were played out along some predetermined template of activity, supposedly represented by the planned building phases of construction. Instead, the flow of many of the acts of construction drew the practitioners on as they confronted the consequences of their actions, most notably in having to deal with the instability of the mound or the intractable mass of collected material resistant to further modification (McFadyen, 2007: 348–54). In her concluding comments on the building of the megalithic mound of Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire, she evokes an engagement with the world where:

To build in such a way, by setting materials on edge, was to employ a building technique that changed matter. Stone was no longer solid and structurally independent but instead became precariously placed and dependent on other materials and people's help. These building techniques also affected the builder by making people acutely aware of themselves and their relations with other people and other things. (2007: 354)

These practical works made people 'acutely aware' of the way materials worked, not so much changing matter, perhaps, as understanding its limitations and possibilities. This was a phenomenology, an emergent subjectivity from Being-in-the-world with the material as it was found, and something that we would misunderstand if we were to attempt to gloss this encounter with a veneer of 'symbolic' significance.

Two further observations now achieve a heightened level of significance in light of our argument. If monument construction was the clearing for a place of revelation that might then become the location of a theoretical (or ritualized) depiction of order, as in an established way of 'seeing the world aright' (cf. Barrett, 2006), then that clearing was brought into being out of a pre-monumental horizon in which the practicalities of new material routines were already being established. New stone technologies, pyrotechnology for pottery manufacture, and the management of domesticates had already transformed the earlier hunter-gatherer routines and landscapes, as is clearly witnessed by the materials found beneath the earliest mounds.⁷ These pre-monument building horizons should prompt us to revisit earlier ideas of a 'pre-monumental Neolithic' (cf. Case, 1969), and they will raise again the profoundly difficult issue of the adoption of the earliest agro-pastoralist economies within pre-existing and long-established

hunter-gatherer landscapes. Perhaps we should allow the possibility that this shift in labour organization, resource management, and energy conservation was already prefigured so substantially among the late hunter-gatherer communities of Britain and elsewhere in Western Europe that the change we have learnt to highlight as the 'Neolithic revolution' was simply one of degree (cf. Gamble, 2007). If this indeed turns out to be the case, then the major transformation that archaeologists have long sought with the establishment of the Neolithic may not occur with the adoption of domesticates as such but lie slightly later with the development of a monumentally enhanced landscape, and this brings us to the second of our observations.

The refinement of dating provided both by the recent technical accomplishments associated with the radiocarbon method and the use of Bayesian statistical procedures to integrate absolute dating and stratigraphic data has allowed for the first time a chronological narrative for monument building to be expressed in terms of dated events rather than being written in terms of general sequences assigned to sometimes lengthy chronological periods. Such resolution would indicate that megalithic and non-megalithic mound construction in southern Britain may have fallen to within a relatively tight chronological horizon (Bayliss and Whittle, 2007). We find this pattern to be entirely in keeping with the theme of this article. Central to our whole argument is the claim that megalithic (and non-megalithic) monuments were not initiated to inscribe a cultural order on the landscape, but by their construction they were the medium that revealed how an order of categories might have operated. Once this order was objectified then the monument became fixed as at the moment of its completion. If the monuments had arisen as the expression of an idea, such as some form of pan-Neolithic ideology, then we might expect to find their construction spanning the entire currency of that 'idea'. This was not the case. We have already suggested that the monuments marked a disjuncture in the history of human subjectivities and material conditions in the early Neolithic. After that disjuncture people could indeed 'objectify the world ... [and] ... create [a] distance between the self and that which is beyond and ... attempt to bridge this distance through a variety of means' (Tilley, 1994: 12). But, as Heidegger revealed, the forgotten point is that people have to be in the world before they can objectify it. It is Heidegger's guidance which we believe gives phenomenology its power as a philosophy of history.

■ CONCLUSION

In the early 1980s British archaeology encountered two profoundly important traditions: the cultural anthropology of structuralism, and the sociology



of human agency.⁸ For a short while this encounter was furthered enlivened by an engagement with the structural-Marxist tradition in anthropology. Hodder's (1982) *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* marks the initial point of impact of these intellectual movements on archaeology. It is unfortunate that the Marxist engagement was so short lived, for what should have been the development of a strongly materialist philosophy began to slide unhappily towards idealism. The sociological emphasis placed on an empowered and knowledgeable human agency as a force in history, combined with the structuralist claims that the world was knowable only in terms of relationships between conceptual categories, resulted in the implied, if not explicit, depiction of historical conditions as being the products of thought imposed on the world. If agents were active then they were so as communicators of ideas and of cosmologies. Indeed, it began to appear as if change in the archaeological record might best be explained as the outcome of a kind of collective consciousness that had managed to rethink the conditions of its own existence (cf. Muller, 1991).

Human subjectivity and material practice are, however, far more complexly intertwined, the nature of which is only further obscured by arguments that attempt to establish the simple determinacy of either one or the other. There is a remarkable poverty in so much of contemporary British archaeology which seeks the symbolic in every kind of artifact, deposit and structure, and where explanation amounts either to demonstrating that the material is 'structured' (that is – ordered), and therefore 'must be' symbolic, or to actually claiming to know what the symbols signify. The only historical information that these kinds of observations impart, as far as we can see, is that the past was culturally dissimilar from the present whilst at the same time, and somewhat reassuringly, housing human subjectivities that we share and which are thus directly available to us.

The human subject must enter the world to find its place and handle the material available to find the categories of semblance out of which an order might be perceived. But the architectures and technologies of life change over time, and with them the possibilities of being in that particular world must also change. These are the dynamic and historical conditions of material existence which we believe a phenomenological approach to landscape can begin to reveal.

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Notes

- 1 Heidegger maintains that it is in our constant engagement with the world – in our ‘Being-in-the-world’ – that the world acquires its meaning. There is no world ‘out there’ that is to be distanced from and observed; the world exists by virtue of our ‘Being-there’ (Dasein). In addition, there is never just one version of the world, since different ‘moods’ – which are the way humans are ‘tuned’ to the world and thus essential structures of our Being – lead to different states of Being, which constitute different worlds.
- 2 Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology attempts to transcend the Cartesian dualism between the subject and object, self and world, by claiming that we are our bodies – we are our lived experiences of our bodies. Thus the focus is on the significance of the body (body-subject) in relation to the world and to others.
- 3 This reading centres on *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962[1927]), supported by various commentaries including Dreyfus (1991), Guignon (1983), Smith (2007) and Steiner (1989).
- 4 Heidegger is notably absent from all the bibliographies of Dennett that we have been able to consult.
- 5 Heidegger (1968[1954]: 149–89) uses the example of the hammer to clarify these contrasting attitudes towards the world: when a hammer is in the midst of being used, it is approached from the mode of ready-to-handedness; however, the moment that the user thinks ‘the hammer is too heavy’, it becomes an object which is present-at-hand.
- 6 Tilley himself appears to regard this methodology as something akin to participant observation: ‘A key methodological tool of anthropology has always been participant observation: being there, experiencing the social events and practices which one wants to understand. And so it is with a phenomenological archaeology’ (2005: 203).
- 7 Forest clearance and changes in woodland management may have been some of the most profound changes upon which direct experience of the material world depended. See, for example, Barrett (1997: 125–8) and Tilley (2007). For pre-mound activity see, for example, the megalithic tombs of Gwernvale (Britnell and Savory, 1984) and Hazleton North (Saville, 1990).
- 8 Similar encounters were occurring on the other side of the Atlantic and elsewhere in northern Europe, but it is the British tradition with which we are concerned in this article.

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