The purpose of this chapter is to outline some of the key elements of a phenomenological approach to landscape archaeology. From a phenomenological perspective, knowledge of landscapes, either past or present, is gained through perceptual experience of them from the point of view of the subject (for some general theoretical and philosophical discussions, see Thomas 2006; Tilley 1994, 2004a, 2005). A phenomenologist attempts to describe these experiences as fully as possible. The objective is to provide a rich or “thick” description allowing others to comprehend these landscapes in their nuanced diversity and complexity, and to enter into these experiences through their metaphorical textual mediation.

**Embodiment**

Embodiment is a central term. A phenomenologist’s experience of landscape is one that takes place through the medium of his or her sensing and sensed carnal body. This involves participant observation which means being a part of what one is attempting to describe and understand. A phenomenologist works and studies landscapes from the “inside.” This may be contrasted with mediated or abstracted “outside” experiences of landscapes, such as those that might be gained from texts, maps, photographs, paintings, or any computer-based technologies, simulations, or statistical analyses. The claim is that studying landscapes through such representations can provide only a relatively superficial and abstracted knowledge. There is no substitute for personal experience.

It follows that for the phenomenologist his or her body is the primary research tool. He or she experiences and observes the landscape through the body. As far as is possible, landscapes are studied without “prejudice.” In other words, the phenomenologist does not start out with a list of hypotheses to be “tested” or a set of prior assumptions about what may, or may not, be significant or important. Rather, he or she enters into the landscape and allows it to have its own impact on his or her perceptive understandings. This is to accept that there is a dialogic relationship between person and landscape. Experiencing the landscape allows insights to be gained through the subject observer’s immersion in that landscape. This is to claim that landscapes have agency in relation to persons. They have a profound effect on our thoughts and interpretations because of the manner in which they are perceived and sensed through our carnal bodies. We cannot, therefore, either represent or understand them in any way we might like. This is an approach that stresses the materiality of landscapes: landscapes as real and physical rather than simply cognized or imagined or represented. The
physicality of landscapes acts as a foundation for all thought and social interaction. It profoundly affects the way we think, feel, move, and act. The phenomenologist is a figure immersed within the ground of landscape. Landscape is fundamental for human existence because it provides both a medium for, and an outcome of, individual and social practices. The physicality of landscapes grounds and orients people and places within them, a physical and sensory resource for living and the social and symbolic construction of life-worlds.

**Temporality**

A phenomenological study takes time. In principle, the longer one experiences a landscape the more it will be understood. First of all, this is because only familiarity can produce a structure of feeling for the landscape, which a phenomenological account attempts to evoke. Second, such a study is based on the understanding that landscapes, unlike their representations, are constituted in space-time; they are always changing, in the process of being and becoming, never exactly the same twice over. Places alter according to natural rhythms, such as the progression of the seasons, the time of day, or qualities of light and shade. The weather, for which an entire archaeology might be developed, is a fundamental medium surrounding and affecting both people and their landscapes (see the discussion in Ingold 2006). Temporality is thus at the heart of a phenomenological study in which we must learn how to see and how to experience and try to learn about the experiences of others in this way (Thomas 1996).

**Places and Paths**

At their simplest and most abstract conceptualization, human (and humanized) landscapes consist of two elements: (1) places and their properties and (2) paths or routes of movement between these places and their properties (Tilley 1994). There can be no noncontextual definition of either landscape or place. All depends on the scale of analysis (see also Head, this volume). A place might be a rock outcrop, a hill, the point at which two streams converge, a field, a dwelling, or a settlement. A phenomenologist attempts to both describe the individual experiences of different kinds of places and the paths or routes between them. The concern is with both stasis and movement. He or she recognizes that there are multiple understandings of both. Places alter with regard to how they are experienced, as do the paths or routes of movement between these two elements: (1) places and their properties and (2) paths or routes of movement between these elements. The phenomenologist attempts to both describe the multisensorial qualities of our human experiences of landscape, that a landscape is simultaneously a visionscape, a touchscape, a soundscape, a smellscape, and a tastescape. These different perceptive experiences occur all at once. Thus, our experience is always synaesthetic (a mingling or blending of the senses), whether we realize or acknowledge this or not. Landscapes reside as much in the tastes of their wines, or the odors of their flowers, as in their visual experiences. Such experiences of landscape, that a landscape is simultaneously a visionscape, a touchscape, a soundscape, a smellscape, and a tastescape. These different perceptive experiences occur all at once. Thus, our experience is always synaesthetic (a mingling or blending of the senses), whether we realize or acknowledge this or not. Landscapes reside as much in the tastes of their wines, or the odors of their flowers, as in their visual experiences. Such

You and I encounter places and paths from a point of view, in both the literal and metaphorical sense of this term, through the medium of our bodies, and the character of this experience changes in relation to both the directionality of our movement and the postures of our bodies. The manner in which we understand places differs inevitably according to how we encounter it from within and the routes we take to reach a place and the sequences of other places we experience along the way. These structure our perceptive experience. Our experience is “colored” by the manner in which we encounter landscapes. Memory is thus fundamental to the nature of our experience. This is simply to accept our own embodied humanity. There can be no “objective” (in the sense of impersonal) experience of landscape. We are infallible humans and can never aspire to be of the status of gods who might comprehend and understand everything from every possible point of view. In our common humanity, we share biologically similar perceptive bodies with others in both the past and the present. We also differ significantly in relation to the cross-cutting divisions of gender, age, class, ethnicity, culture, and knowledges. These together with the physicality of our bodies provide both essential resources and limitations for our understanding of landscapes.

**Sensory Experience**

To understand landscapes phenomenologically requires the art of walking in and through them, to touch and be touched by them. An experience of landscape mediated by trains or cars or airplanes is always partial or distanciated. The view from the airplane is, of course, inhuman. We do not normally see or experience landscapes in this manner. The view from the car or train window is sensorily deprived: experience is reduced to vision. The phenomenologist acknowledges the multisensorial qualities of our human experiences of landscape, that a landscape is simultaneously a visionscape, a touchscape, a soundscape, a smellscape, and a tastescape. These different perceptive experiences occur all at once. Thus, our experience is always synaesthetic (a mingling or blending of the senses), whether we realize or acknowledge this or not. Landscapes reside as much in the tastes of their wines, or the odors of their flowers, as in their visual experiences. Such
a multisensory approach in archaeology, in which discussions of the visual in relation to landscape have always dominated, is only just beginning to be developed (e.g., Cummings 2002; Fowler and Cummings 2003; Goldhahn 2002; Jones 2006; Jones and MacGregor 2002; Tilley 2004; Watson and Keating 1999).

The phenomenologist undertakes a task that is simultaneously very simple and incredibly difficult. He or she “resides” in places and walks between them. This is a humble, potentially subversive, and democratic project open to student or teacher alike, requiring no fancy technical equipment or expertise in using it, or money beyond that required for subsistence. Archaeological excavations, by contrast, are fertile breeding grounds for institutionalized power and the egos of their directors (Bender, Hamilton, and Tilley 2007). For the phenomenologist, technical equipment, as often as not, gets in the way, because it always mediates and limits experience. Beyond a notebook and pencil, a camera may be useful in capturing some aspects of visual experience, but little else is usually required.

**Poetics and the Body**

A phenomenological study is always limited, and the limits are essentially the limits of one’s own body. Landscape studies conducted in this manner are inevitably small scale. It would not be possible to conduct such a study of the world or even of a nation-state such as France. Clearly, this is beyond human possibility, but we could build up a comparative global phenomenological study through comparing and contrasting the accounts of different social scientists. Phenomenological landscape studies are inevitably particularistic rather than generalizing. They attempt to capture the poetics and politics of paths and places (Bender 1998; Cummings 2003; Edmonds 2006; Edmonds and Seabourne 2002; Scarre 2002; Tilley 1996, 1999).

The human perceptive experience of landscape is inevitably structured in relation to basic bodily dyads: things that are to the front or the back of an observer, those that are above or below, to the left or right of the body, near or far away. These dualisms are directly related to basic body symmetries. It is necessary, therefore, that experiential qualities of landscape be described and discussed in these terms. In relation to the body, vision is the most distanciated of the senses: we can often see much farther than we can hear or smell landscapes. For us to touch sticking out the tongue) requires taking things into our bodies and is thus the most intimate of the senses.

It has been claimed that different hierarchies of the senses exist in different cultures, vision most important in Western modernity, smell or sound in other cultures. However, the very attempt to single out any particular sensory dimension and suggest it has all-pervasive significance in one culture rather than in another is an unhelpful simplification. Which of the senses is most significant depends both on context and the practices being undertaken; smells may be relatively more important in one context, sounds or sight or touch in another, and analysis needs to be sensitive to these variations rather than the scenario of one culture and one dominant sense (Tilley 2006). For example, I have recently argued that in many areas of prehistoric lowland Europe, the advent of the Neolithic ushered in a sensory revolution in relation to the perception of landscape. The removal of forest cover allowed vision to become a distant and dominant sense in relation to the landscape for the first time. Without the trees, the contours and shapes of the land could be seen in a completely different manner, as could people, monuments, and places within it. By contrast, in a densely forested Mesolithic landscape, smell and sound might be far more important in relation to orientation and resource exploitation, with sight being a far more intimate bodily sense (Tilley 2007).

**“Nature” and “Culture”**

Landscapes themselves influence forms of perception and activity, but they do not determine thought and action and not anything can be made of them. They offer a series of affordances for living and acting in the world, and a series of constraints. We cannot determine in advance what may be of particular significance in any specific case. In one landscape, rock outcrops may be the most significant reference points; in another, river valleys and so on (Tilley 2004b). One of our most common prejudices in landscape archaeology is to assume that the most important places in the landscape are those that have been humanly created, such as settlement sites and monuments. One of the most obvious phenomenological questions we try to answer is this: why was this place chosen rather than another? However, such a question cannot be answered in isolation. We need to consider the monument or settlement in relation to others, (searching for locational pat-
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which requires analyzing its sensory affordances or constraints and the ways in which it might be experienced differently if approached from one direction rather than another. We cannot assume that the places for which we have no evidence of human presence were not important (Bradley 2000). The peculiar hill or ridge without a monument may be of equal significance. A “natural” stone may be as, if not more significant than those deliberately erected and there may exist both mimetic and contrastive relationships between humanly created and unaltered places (Rowlands and Tilley 2006; Tilley 1996; Tilley, Hamilton, and Bender 2000). A phenomenological study of landscape thus requires a holistic approach in which we pay as much attention to the “natural” as the “cultural,” to places with and without evidence of human alteration or activity (Tilley and Bennett 2002; Tilley et al. 2000).

Our experience of any unfamiliar landscape is that of a child. Gradually we need to explore, to learn how to look, to hear, to smell, to touch, and to taste. We need to open out our bodies to all these sensory dimensions as much as is possible, to try and experience landscapes from the inside. In relation to past as opposed to contemporary landscapes, the task is inevitably difficult, since so much has irrevocably altered. But much also remains in the form of the geological and topographic “bones” of the land: the character of the rocks, the mountains and hills, valleys and the river courses, sometimes the coastline. The deafening sound of the waterfall (Goldhahn 2002) or the smell of rotting seaweed or meadow-sweet, the sight of the conical hill, the way in which a stone feels to touch and its color, experiences of light and darkness within monuments, or the taste of honey may remain almost the same now as then; we do, in this limited sense, still have a direct bodily connection with the past.

Methodological Implications

There can be no rulebook method to undertaking “good” phenomenological research. What I offer is a sketch of the basic stages involved in my own style of phenomenological research:

1. Familiarizing oneself with the landscape through walking within and around it, developing a feeling for it and opening up oneself to it;
2. Visiting known places of prehistoric style of phenomenological research: “good” phenomenological research. What I offer is a sketch of the basic stages involved in my own

affordances and constraints they provide. This requires writing and then visually recording, through still or video photography, these experiences in the place, creating a written and visual text (rather than a series of abbreviated notes), because the very process of writing is a primary aid and stimulus to perception;
3. Revisiting the same places during different seasons or times of the day as far as is possible, experiencing them in and through the weather;
4. Approaching these places from different directions and recording the manner in which their character alters as a result;
5. Following paths of movement through the landscape and recording the manner in which this may change the manner in which places within it are perceived in relation to each other. These paths of movement will usually be suggested by features of the landscape itself, such as, for example, following the lines of ridges or the courses of valleys, or prehistoric monuments within it, such as, for instance, walking along the line of a stone row, a cursus monument, a cross-ridge dyke, a Roman road, or between nearby groups of barrows or settlements (Barclay and Harding 1999; Bradley 2002; Parker-Pearson et al. 2006; Tilley 1994, 1999, 2004b; Witcher 1998);
6. Visiting and exploring and recording "natural" places within the landscape for which there is little or no archaeological evidence of human activity (Bradley 2000; Tilley and Bennett 2002; Tilley et al. 2000);
7. Drawing together all these observations and experiences in the form of a synthetic text and imaginatively interpreting them in terms of possible prehistoric life-worlds: how people in the past made sense of, lived in, and understood their landscapes (e.g., Bender, Hamilton, and Tilley 2007; Tilley 2004).

Conclusions

All landscapes have profound significance and meaning for persons and groups. These are, as often as not, variable and contested: related to different interests and practices (Bender and Winer 2001). Although landscapes have meanings whose significance we can attempt to interpret
have experiential effects in relation to persons—the two are intimately linked. For example, prehistoric rock carvings or monuments undoubtedly had specific sets of meanings that we can try to semiotically decode. They also have specific somatic effects that we can describe, such as having to move in one direction or another, within and between them, and in terms of light and sound and touch (Goldhahn 2002; Jones 2006; Tilley 2004). The significance these places had, and the emotional and kinaesthetic effects they produced in relation to the body, are likely to be intimately related, because meaning and doing work exist both through the body and through the mind. Because our minds and thoughts are embodied, the manner in which we think is profoundly structured by the kinds of bodies and the sensory apparatus we possess.

Phenomenological approaches to landscape archaeology remain in their infancy. There is an enormous amount of comparative field research to be undertaken. Phenomenological studies attempt to explore landscapes on the basis of the full depth of their human sensory experience. To be a good phenomenologist is to try to develop an intimacy of contact with the landscape akin to that between lovers.

References


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