Chapter 7

Homing Instincts

Grounded Identities and Dividual Selves in the British Bronze Age

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Preface

Since the early 1990s, phenomenology has formed a basis for interpretations of a range of prehistoric buildings and monuments. Such approaches have been argued to provide insights into the interpretation and experience of these structures in the past. Yet, in focusing on the grounded and place-centred nature of human experience, we may be in danger of reproducing in the past particular elements of our own cultural context, notably the centrality of place in the construction of ontological security (as the ideology surrounding the "home" in modern English society demonstrates). Phenomenology emphasises the physicality of architecture in the creation of social identity at the expense of the social networks in which humans are embedded. This strikes a chord with high modernity in which communities and families are fragmenting while the home improvement industry booms. In contrast, this paper will explore how the materiality of the "home" belies its essentially cultural character and how even in our own society, the same house can be quite differently understood and experienced according to context. This paper will challenge the widespread assumption (reflected obliquely in recent

phenomenological approaches) that self identity, as constructed through contexts such as the "home", is necessarily monolithic, fixed and unchanging. Drawing on anthropological studies of the self, a relational conception of the person provides the theoretical backdrop for an understanding of power relations within the domestic world of the settlement. The implications of this for our understanding of the domestic domain and gender relations in the past will be explored, in particular the challenge it poses to the idea that women's identities are inextricably and universally bound up with the domestic context. Ways of approaching the slippery and contextual nature of selfhood, identity and social power will be discussed using the example of British Bronze Age roundhouses.

Introduction

Recent phenomenological accounts of prehistoric buildings and monuments suggest that the materiality of architecture plays a crucial role in shaping human experience of place (examples include Barrett, 1994: Ch. 1–2; Bender et al., 1997; Richards 1993; Thomas, 1991: Ch. 3, 1993b, 1996, Tilley, 1994). Writers within this genre argue that it is embodied encounters with an ordered material world that shape interpretation. For example, the orientation of the human body and the sequence of spaces through which it moves is argued to produce a particular "perspective", both in the visual and social sense of the term. Based on this, it has been suggested that place acts recursively to produce specific types of subjectivity. This has social and political implications. For example, rules of admission to or exclusion from parts of a building may be differentially applied to particular social groups, so that experience of space is intimately bound up with aspects of personal identity.

These points are extremely useful and have been drawn on to underpin novel and valuable interpretations of Neolithic monuments and other forms of architecture. However, to move from generalised discussion of how space influences interpretation to an understanding of the ways in which particular buildings shaped past experience is more difficult. One way in which archaeologists have attempted to do so is by describing their own subjective experience as they themselves move through buildings or monuments—encountering a rise or fall in gradient, a change in orientation or in the way the body must be held, a sudden vista or a new texture to the walls of a building. The assumption here is that experience in the present equates in important respects with experience in the past. The problem with this, as we shall see below, is that it downplays the potential diversity of interpretation. In other words, it is assumed that the materiality of architecture is productive of very particular types of experience and by extension very specific forms of social identity.

In this paper, I would like to focus on one class of building: the Bronze Age roundhouse. In Britain, a number of authors have written about prehistoric houses in what might be characterised as broadly phenomenological terms (e.g. Hingley,

1990; Parker Pearson and Richards, 1994b; Richards, 1990). Although these have produced highly evocative accounts of gender relations in these cultural contexts, I shall argue here that in fact a phenomenological approach does not provide an effective methodology for accessing how people experienced and interpreted houses in the distant past. This is because the materiality of house architecture does not constrain interpretation to the extent that is often assumed. Because the "house" is a cultural construct, archaeologists' imagined experience of prehistoric houses is unlikely to be commensurate with that of their original occupants. Similarly, I would like to explore how a single form of architecture—the roundhouse—may have produced a variety of very different forms of subjectivity in the past.

This chapter will therefore consider the relationship between space and identity with specific reference to house architecture in Bronze Age Britain. In many societies, gender relationships are structured and mediated through the organisation of household space, and the construction of gendered identity will therefore be a focus of interest here. In particular, I would like to examine how despite the apparent "stability" of architecture, buildings do not produce static or unchanging forms of gender relationships. On the contrary, depending on context, gender can be differently constructed in relation to the same architectural space.

Buildings and the Body

The idea that the archaeologist's bodily experience of a building in the present can provide a window into the past is seductive, but it is based on a number of problematic assumptions. Within archaeology, phenomenological approaches take as one of their central tenets the idea that it is through people's embodied encounter with the material world that they come to attain "Being". The human body is the centre of spatial experience, mediating between the individual and the world. An initial problem arises, then, when we recall the anthropological and sociological literature that argues that the human body is a social construct as much as a material entity. Not only is there a recursive relationship between the body and "society", in that one models the other (Douglas, 1970), but so too ideas of pollution and beauty, sexuality and selfhood, substance and heredity vary from culture to culture (e.g. Butler, 1993; Feher et al., 1989; Foucault, 1990; Gatens, 1996; Schilling, 1993; Turner, 1992). Our own notion of what the body is must be contextualised within a largely Christian and androcentric heritage, moreover a context in which reason is separated from emotion and self from other (Thomas, 2002). Although a phenomenological approach contends with these issues, it cannot fully achieve what it sets out to do while the body itself remains unproblematised within these discussions (of those who write from such a perspective, only Thomas engages explicitly with this question). If, as phenomenologists would argue, the body is constitutive of experience, then experience will vary according

to the "type" of body one has. Not only will different bodies in the most material sense—young and old, for example—experience the world differently, but so too the social construction of "youth" or "old age" will have a major affect on how the world is apprehended via those bodies.

A second problem lies in the materiality of architecture. In some cases, we can suggest that a building would have imposed roughly the same physical constraints on the bodies of ancient people as it does on our own today. However, while architecture may make us turn to the left, or stoop, or fall, our actual *interpretation* of this depends on our understanding of that movement or gesture. Here, prior experience, based on culturally-specific ideas about the meaning of, for example, crawling or standing, will have an affect. Likewise, whether we experience apprehension or excitement, joy or fear in a place will depend on the cultural meanings attached to that location, just as in our own society our experience of a street, church or workplace differ because of the different ideas, sentiments and memories associated with these locations. In other words, we cannot directly replicate prehistoric people's experience of an ancient monument or other structure without taking into account the many different forms and sources of cultural knowledge that they would have brought with them into any situation.

It is of course important to point out that these criticisms apply largely to phenomenological approaches within archaeology rather than to phenomenology as a general philosophy. Within other disciplines, writers drawing on phenomenology more explicitly recognise the recursive nature of Being. Although the body is constitutive of experience, it has no primordial existence; rather, it is itself is a product of experiential engagement with the world (e.g. Levin, 1985; Mensch, 2001). This allows for the construction of different types of bodies which may experience the world in radically different ways (e.g. Rogers, 1983: 123–4). It is perhaps because archaeologists have attempted to employ phenomenology as a *methodology* as well as a theoretical framework that these problems arise. In order to reconstruct the ways in which people in the past might have understood a particular building or monument, archaeologists have often made reductive assumptions regarding the nature of the body.

The criticisms outlined above have particular relevance when it comes to considering the interpretation and experience of household space in the past. Circular structures termed "roundhouses" are the main type of domestic building known from the British Bronze Age (Figure 1). However, to attempt to use the architecture of a roundhouse as a means of accessing Bronze Age people's interpretations of settlement space would be problematic for a number of reasons. For example, it is unlikely that different gender groups' experience of domestic space in the past was identical. The body is a primary locus of gender negotiation; gender differences are constructed and represented through the body (e.g. Butler, 1993; Gatens, 1996; Grosz and Probyn, 1995; Jordanova, 1980; Laqueur, 1990). An interpretative framework which presupposes the existence of an ahistorical transcendental

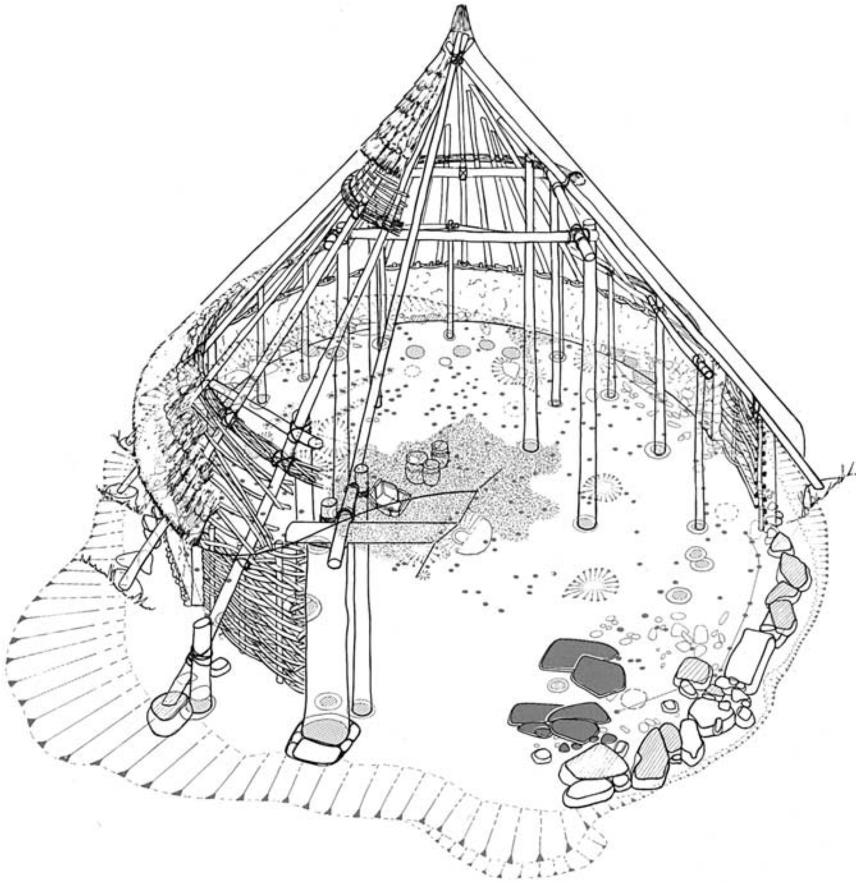

Figure 1. Artist's reconstruction of one of the roundhouses at Trethellan Farm, Cornwall (after Nowakowski, 1991).

body will be unable to explore the different ways in which domestic space could have been encountered. If we assume that the settlement is one of the primary loci within which gendered identities were constituted and negotiated in the past, then it becomes particularly important to take these issues into account.

For other reasons too, a gender-sensitive approach is especially necessary when it comes to studies of settlement. Within our own cultural context, certain forms of discourse have posited a "natural" and universal link between women and the domestic domain (for critique, see La Fontaine, 1981; Moore, 1988: 21–4; Strathern, 1984: 24–6, 30–31; Tiffany, 1978: 42–3, 46; Waterson, 1990: 169–71; Yanagisako, 1979: 190–91). Archaeology, as a form of culture criticism, must therefore be more than usually careful here: it must avoid positing the existence of

a single interpretation of space to the detriment of other sub-groups' experience, yet neither should it assume a uniform association between women and the domestic context in the past (for further discussion, see below). Just as the interpretation of settlement space may have been gender specific in the past, so too the way in which women in the present experience and understand the domestic domain cannot in any way be taken to approximate how women in the past felt about these places.

The argument that the meanings attached to a place will influence people's physical experience of that location is also of primary importance here. As suggested above, if we use phenomenology as a means of accessing past experience, then at one level we must presuppose the existence of an ahistorical material world. Such an assumption would clearly be extremely problematic in relation to settlement. The idea of "home" is richly evocative within our own cultural context, bringing to mind a particular set of activities, social relations and experiences, set within a specific ideological framework (see papers in Benjamin, 1995). Our homes are essential components of personal identity; in the modern western world, people who are described as "homeless" are treated in ways that indicate that they are viewed as less than human, as threatening beings who defy description, categorisation and control in the usual way (e.g. Dear and Wolch, 1987).

Houses also play a major role in the constitution of age and gender relationships (more of this below) and are bound up with class identity; in Britain today, for example, it is the middle classes and those who aspire to join their ranks who show a particular interest in "home improvement" and "DIY". Such activities also facilitate the expression of a series of different gendered identities ranging from the "manly" provider of 1950's magazines to the more diverse and often flamboyant interior designers of today's television programmes (Goldstein, 1998). Moreover, the house is a central point of reference within temporal frameworks; leaving home marks a particular stage within the modern western lifecourse just as surely as the daily routine of departure and return structures the passage of time at a more immediate level. As such, the home forms a pivotal focus in our sense of ontological security (Parker Pearson and Richards, 1994). Perhaps because of this, it is all too easy to assume the universality of the concept of "home" in other cultural contexts, making a phenomenology of the home particularly seductive. If, on the other hand, we recognise that other societies may not share the complex of meanings and values that surrounds the home in our own culture, then the idea that place—in this case the home—*in and of itself* triggers experiences that both archaeologists in the present and people in the past can be said to share becomes questionable.

Constructing the Self

I have suggested above that when we encounter a building, monument or landscape, we bring with us cultural knowledge that influences our experience

and interpretation of these places. This point reminds us of the importance of the social relations in which we are embedded; such knowledge is, after all, a product of socio-cultural context. In general, phenomenological approaches within archaeology tend to prioritise the materiality of place in shaping human experience over and above the social networks and value-systems which give meaning to those locations.

Interestingly, this relative evaluation of the social and the material could be said to be especially characteristic of western male ways of looking at the world. Women's sense of self within our own cultural context often lays a greater emphasis on relationships with others than that of men, which may rely more on individual achievement and interaction with or control of the physical world (this view is, of course, a stereotype reflecting only one of the many conflicting ways in which "men" and "women" are represented in modern western society).

The focus on place over and above social relations within phenomenological approaches may also arise out of the perceived disintegration of "traditional" kinship networks and communities in many parts of modern western Europe, particularly urban areas. More and more, it is place that provides us with both identity and security. We can see this, for example, in the burgeoning home improvement industry and in the proliferation of television programmes, magazines and services that relate to the aesthetic and symbolic elaboration of the domestic context. This is particularly interesting, given that women are no longer seen as primarily tied to the home and that certain categories of men and women (the employed) spend more and more time outside of the home as working hours increase. Although the amount of time many people spend at home is decreasing, yet its importance remains primary, an indication that the "home" answers particular social and ontological needs within modern western society. At the same time, at least some television programmes focusing on "home improvement" are aimed at those who spend part of the day at home (these programmes are often broadcast mid-morning or mid-afternoon); this hints that the domestic context fulfils equally important, if somewhat different roles in the construction of identity for people who, for example, are unemployed, work from home or care for children.

The idea that different people can experience the same place in quite different ways stems in part out of the essentially social nature of interpretation and experience. By focusing primarily on the interaction between the human body and the material world, we risk passing over significant aspects of the ways in which a person moving through a monument or landscape is historically and culturally constituted. To date, phenomenological accounts have focused on how places, through their very physicality, create particular kinds of subject. The conception of the self that is conjured up in this process is one of a subject whose experience is constructed purely within and through the architecture of the space in question; in this way, the self is represented as a stable, bounded and homogeneous entity (Brück 2001). By way of contrast, anthropological and feminist discussions of the self stress that

personhood is a complex, fluid, socially-mediated and contextually-specific concept (e.g. Brah, 1996; Broch-Due and Rudie, 1993; Butler, 1990; B. Morris, 1994; Probyn, 1996; Strathern, 1988, 1991). Here, I want to explore how a contextual or relational conception of personhood can help us to provide a somewhat different understanding of how humans engage with place. This allows the recontextualisation of those spaces we study as archaeologists, reminding us that contexts outside of the immediate physical setting inform interpretation of a place and that the social relations in which people are embedded facilitate different ways of seeing and experiencing space.

A relational conception of personhood takes as its basis the idea that self-identity is constructed out of a person's relationships with others (Fajans, 1985; Ito, 1985; B. Morris, 1994; Read, 1955; Strathern, 1988, 1991). Part of the self originates in other people: the series of interchanges engaged in over the course of a lifetime links one with different people in changing and fluid ways. Self-identity is also bound up in and constructed through the various significant places and events encountered over a person's lifespan. In this sense, the self is both spatially and temporally dispersed and is always in the process of becoming; in no simple way can the self be thought of as coterminous with the human body. This is what Strathern (1988, 1991; following Marriott, 1976) terms the "dividual" self: people are not unitary and unchanging beings but are comprised of a series of parts or fragments which become incorporated, reconfigured and dispersed through such processes as marriage, exchange and parenthood. Because part of people's self-identity and way of viewing the world is constituted outside of the building or landscape in which they find themselves at any one moment, interpretation within that context cannot be precisely controlled, making a variety of different "perspectives" possible (for more detailed discussion, see Brück, 2001). People bring with them a range of pre-understandings that influence their interpretation and experience of the spaces they encounter. While their movements within space may be constrained by the physical features of a landscape or building, their interpretation of that space cannot be fully controlled because their cultural knowledge is in part constructed within other places and out of other relationships.

The "Domestic Domain"

This underlines the fact that architecture does not of itself create particular ways of perceiving and interpreting the world. The same building or landscape can produce quite different experiences. This has implications for the interpretation of domestic buildings in the past. Even where a structure has formal similarities with our idealised notion of a house (for example the presence of a hearth, evidence for food storage and preparation or other daily maintenance activities), we must be careful to avoid the implicit assumption that the set of values, perceptions and

social relations realised within this space was in any way similar to that produced in our own homes. We know that today "houses" in different cultural contexts produce very different gender distinctions and gendered experiences (for example, see Waterson's 1990 discussion of different southeast Asian societies). Moreover, even within a single cultural context, the same "house" can be understood and experienced differently according to context. For example, on the island of Sumba in Indonesia, during the performance of certain household rituals, the innermost, sacred part of the house is associated with men and the ancestors (ibid.: 99). During the everyday life of the house, on the other hand, these same areas are most closely associated with women, while it is the world outside of the house that is conceptually linked with men. On Timor, the ordering of space within Atoni houses again reflects gender ideologies but the gender categories produced cannot be seen as fixed (ibid.: 171–5). In certain contexts, the right hand side of the house is associated with men and is considered more honoured. For example, children and lower status guests are not allowed to sleep on the "great platform" which is situated here. However, the left hand side, which is associated with women, is also the ritual centre of the house, and women are responsible for the spiritual well-being of the household; this part of the house is therefore valued more highly than the right hand side on particular occasions. In a similar way, Bourdieu's classic study on the Berber house (1979) indicates that the meanings and values attached to space are far from static. As such, they allow for the generation of a variety of different types of interpretation and experience. Hence, the type of self produced through domestic architecture cannot be seen as a fixed entity. This hints at some of the problems surrounding approaches which take the definition of "woman" to be a stable and homogeneous category either within or across cultural groupings; the way in which gendered identities are created within the domestic domain allows for a series of different types of self to be produced according to context.

A critique of the concept "domestic domain" provides some related lines of thought. In the modern western world, the home is sharply differentiated both spatially and conceptually from other arenas of practice (Brück, 1999a; Moore, 1988: 21–4; Strathern, 1984: 24–6, 30–31; Tiffany, 1978: 42–3, 46; Waterson, 1990: 169–71). Political, economic and religious activities each have their own circumscribed spaces outside of the domestic context and these have largely been dominated by men in recent centuries. This means that the home is characterised as passive, private and feminine in contrast with the active, public and male-dominated world of production and politics. The idea of the domestic domain as a bounded and universal category of space associated with an unchanging and uniform class of person—women—bears similarities to the notion of the person as a stable homogeneous entity cut off from other people and unaltered by aspects of context beyond the materiality of space. Just as the person can be seen as fluid and contextually-constructed, so too the home is not a changeless "thing", but is essentially a cultural construction (as the papers in Benjamin [1995] demonstrate so clearly).

In fact, in many societies, the domestic domain is not cut off from politics, economics or ritual, but forms one of the main arenas in which such activities take place (e.g. Waterson, 1990). In kinship-based communities, for example, the household group may itself form a political entity (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995). In non-industrialised societies, the home is a major locus for productive as well as maintenance and reproductive activities (Wilk and Netting, 1984). It may also be a focus for a range of important ritual activities (e.g. Boivin, 2000; Parker Pearson and Richards, 1994a; Richards, 1996). Thus, just as the domestic domain is not cut off from other aspects of daily life, so women's identities are not purely constituted through those activities which we—from the vantage point of the modern western world—define as typically domestic, in particular childcare, reproduction and maintenance activities. Because domestic practice is interdigitated with other aspects of social life, women's sense of self is constituted not only through their association with the domestic domain—whatever form that association may take—but also through their participation in activities and social relationships that have an impact outside of the domestic context as well as within it. Moreover, this suggests that in other societies, it is not just women who are defined in relation to the domestic domain; men's identities may also be bound up with their "homes" and constructed in relation to those practices that they carry out within the settlement (e.g. Hugh-Jones, 1995; Waterson, 1990).

Of course, household membership is not always based on kinship or conjugal relationships nor is biological reproduction necessarily a primary function of the household group (Wilk and Netting, 1984). Households may comprise unrelated individuals, such as members of age-sets; in our own society, the student household provides a good example. Elsewhere, the existence of separate men's houses and women's houses is well-documented. Amongst the Akan of Ghana, a woman and her children form a matricentral cell in a compound housing matrilateral relatives (Woodford-Berger, 1981). Her husband is a member of a different household and lives apart from his wife, although he receives food and visits from her. Here, a domestic function transgresses household boundaries and biological reproduction is not a defining feature of the household group. Again, this underlines the variability in gender structures and gender ideologies reproduced through the house. As such, we must take particular care to avoid assumptions regarding the way in which the architecture of the house is constitutive of particular experiences.

It is perhaps because of the limitations of phenomenological approaches as discussed above that where such ideas have been applied to houses in the past, the gender relations inferred have retained a certain amount of familiarity (e.g. Hingley, 1990; Parker Pearson and Richards, 1994b; Richards, 1990). Because of the interpretative primacy of the archaeologist's own physical encounter with the architecture, it has become difficult to probe in depth the possibility that houses may have produced quite different experiences and different selves in the past. Hence,

the deep, dark, back spaces of ancient dwellings are often interpreted as associated with women. As such, it is all too easy to ascribe ethnocentrically-derived values to these, seeing them perhaps as lower status, dirty, close to nature or peripheral. In contrast, the bright central or front areas of houses are often designated as higher status and are implicitly or explicitly described as male spaces. Houses in the past begin to look—comfortably or uncomfortably—like houses in the present. What I hope to explore here is how space may be ascribed different associations and values according to context; although many anthropological accounts of the use of space have posited the existence of strictly gendered divisions of space to which static "dominant" meanings are attached, it is fair to say that the structuralist orientation of many of these studies may have hampered a subtle appreciation of how space can be differentially valued according to who is using it and when. Within archaeology, it has proved tempting to employ similar structuralist methodologies to interpret the "meaning" of household space in the past, although it has often proved difficult to override our own cultural preconceptions concerning the meaning and value of spaces such as "back" and "front".

To conclude this section, there are two simple points to be made here in relation to the domestic domain. First, the domestic context is not in itself a static and transhistorical thing. The ideas, concepts, values and types of people associated with it vary considerably from culture to culture. Moreover, we can by no means make assumptions about the articulation of "domestic" activities with other arenas of practice. In many societies, there is no sharp distinction between domestic practice and productive, ritual or political activities. Indeed, the types of activities that would be described as typically "domestic" vary from society to society; in many communities, for example, the making of pottery forms a routine part of the productive and maintenance activities of the household, although in modern western Europe this is rarely the case. Furthermore, within any one society, the actual nature and experience of the domestic domain changes according to context and according to who is doing the interpreting. Place, then, is an inherently fluid thing. As such, it does not create one single category of person but is implicated in the production of many different types of self.

Second, although place has an important role to play in the constitution of the self, it is only one factor out of several. A person's relationships with others, stretching as they do across time and space, are also primary, as are events and locations beyond the immediate physical context in which one finds oneself at any single moment. This means that even in those cultural contexts where women are strongly associated with the domestic domain, their identity and experience as women is never solely constituted within and through the "home". Women are not constructed as unitary or unchanging beings (although they may be represented as such in certain discourses). Rather, their sense of self and their experience of "womanhood" will change according to context. People, like places, are continuously in the process of being constructed.

Bronze Age Roundhouses

In this section, I want to explore some of the ways in which a sense of self was constituted through the domestic context in the Middle Bronze Age of southern England. The archaeological record of this period is dominated by settlements and field systems (Barrett, 1994: Ch. 6; Barrett and Bradley, 1980a). Settlements usually comprise several roundhouses and ancillary structures or features such as granaries, working areas and ponds; they may be enclosed by banks, ditches or fences (e.g. Figure 2; Barrett et al., 1991; Drewett, 1982; Ellison, 1981, 1987). It is unlikely that all of the roundhouses on a site were in use at the same time, and it is widely accepted that these sites represent the settlements of small extended family groups that were inhabited and modified over a period of some years. Many settlements possessed their own small cemetery (Bradley, 1981). The presence of male, female and juvenile burials suggests that kinship was a primary structuring

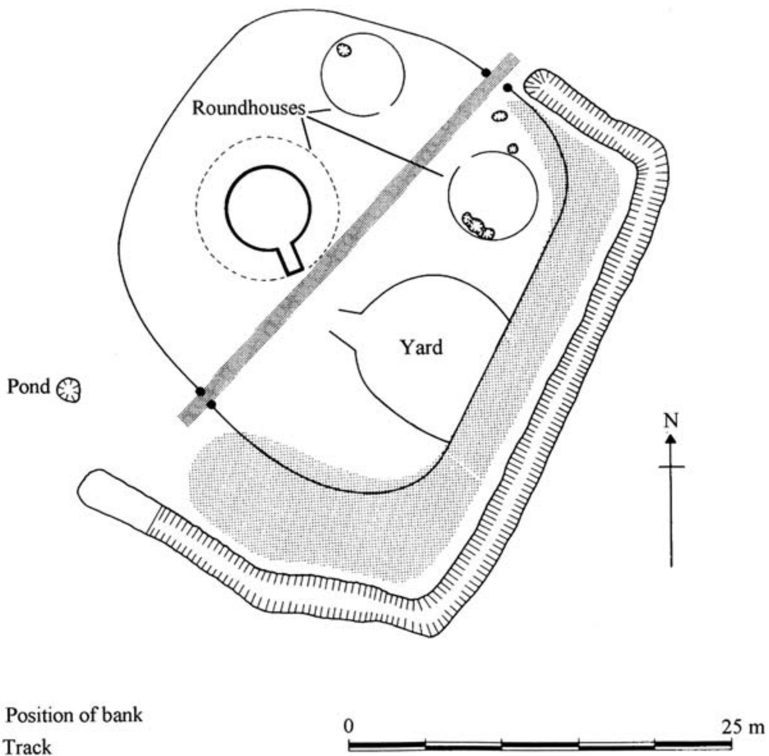

Figure 2. Schematic plan of the settlement at Down Farm, Dorset (after Barrett, Bradley and Green, 1991: fig. 5.41).

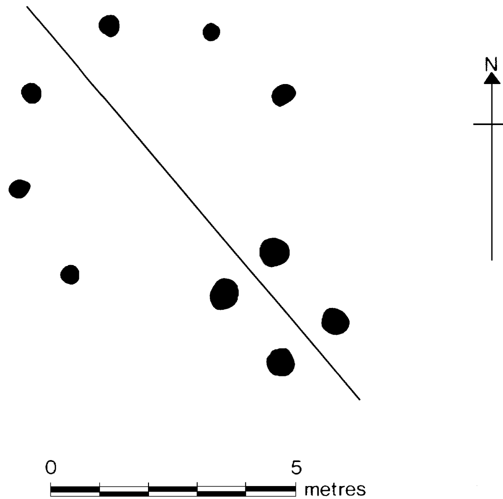

Figure 3. Plan of structure A, Down Farm, Dorset, with axial line drawn to indicate symmetrical layout of posts (after Barrett, Bradley and Green, 1991: fig. 5.29).

element of the Middle Bronze Age household (Ellison, 1980), although it remains difficult to identify the nature and organisation of such "families", or the forms of inheritance and marriage that might have been practised (see Drewett, 1982 for one particular interpretation). Although such small farmsteads are likely to have formed the main units of agricultural production, the layout of contemporary field systems suggests inter-household co-operation with some degree of pooling of labour (Fleming, 1988).

I want to begin by suggesting that a single Middle Bronze Age "house" (and I use the term here advisedly) could have produced a variety of different interpretations and experiences of space. During this period, a relatively standardised form of domestic architecture, the roundhouse, appeared across much of southern Britain (Figure 3; Brück, 1999b; Guilbert, 1982; Musson, 1970; Parker Pearson and Richards, 1994b). These buildings were predominantly oriented towards the south-east and many had a porch or other architecturally elaborated entrance. With axial symmetry in the placement of major structural elements, and a technique of construction which involved a main circular setting of load-bearing posts several feet inside the outer wall of the building, the potential arose for the division of roundhouse space into several different areas: front and back, left and right, centre and periphery (of course, we must remain aware of the loaded nature of such descriptive terms).

However, despite the appearance of a "typical" roundhouse form, this does not mean that identity and experience was constituted within these spaces in a uniform and constrained manner. If we look at the spatial location of activities,

there is considerable inter-site variability, suggesting that these buildings could be used quite differently within different regional or local traditions (Brück, 1999b). It is of course often difficult to distinguish spatial patterns which may relate to the original use of the building from those that are a product of post-abandonment disturbance, but in many cases, the distribution of artefacts mirrors the divisions of space created by the architecture. Despite this, it is not possible to identify consistent inter-site patterning in the location of particular activities. Variation occurs between sites in terms of what activities took place within the house, where these were carried out and which of the potential architectural divisions were drawn on to create spatial differentiation. Here, then, it is not the roundhouse in and of itself which shapes experience but people's active and culturally-specific use of that space. The Middle Bronze Age house was not a unitary entity which created one set of experiential realities, but was variously constituted within different local contexts. Although more difficult to demonstrate archaeologically, we can use this to suggest that even within any one society, different people or groups of people may likewise have read the roundhouse differently; such readings would have been influenced by experience, cultural knowledge, agenda and perspective, all of which may have differed according to factors such as age, gender and social standing. Some of the sources of this variability will be explored below.

Secondly, I want to demonstrate that in the Middle Bronze Age, the domestic domain included activities which in the modern western world take place largely outside of the home. In fact, archaeologists have always been aware of the potential importance of productive and ritual activities on settlements in prehistory, although their identification of these has rarely informed their interpretation (whether explicit or implicit) of gender relations in the past. For the Middle Bronze Age, productive activities such as the weaving of cloth (quite possibly for external exchange as well as domestic consumption) is indicated by the abundance of loom weights on many settlements (Barrett and Bradley, 1980b). It is one of the interesting features of this period that loom weights now appear in considerable numbers in certain parts of Britain, given the relative lack of evidence for cloth production in preceding centuries. Evidence for ritual practice is also widespread on these sites in the form of votive deposits (Brück, 1999b). Whole quernstones, inverted fineware pots, animal burials and small bronze objects were buried in pits, ditches and postholes. I have argued elsewhere (ibid.) that such deposits drew attention to significant locations in space (such as boundaries and entrances; e.g. Figure 4). They also marked out important points in the agricultural cycle and in the life of the settlement and its inhabitants. Political activities focused on settlement sites may be indicated by evidence for feasting in the form of large mounds of burnt flint, such as that at South Lodge Camp, Dorset (Barrett et al., 1991: 161). It is thought that flint was used in the cooking technology of the period to heat water and other liquids in vessels that were not sufficiently well-fired to stand direct heat from a hearth. In a society where the household group appears to have been the basic unit

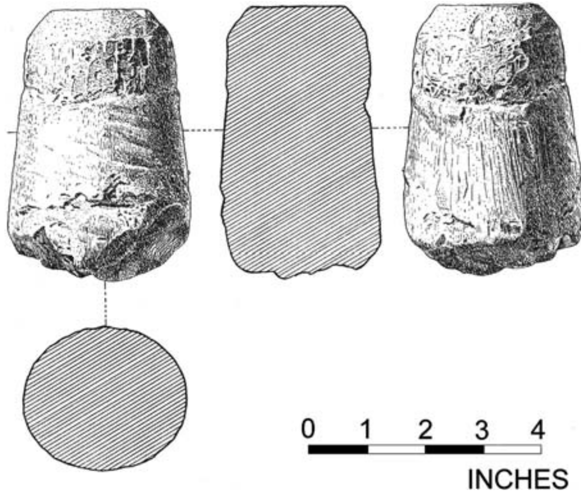

Figure 4. The chalk "phallus" found standing upright on the base of a posthole in the entrance to roundhouse D at Itford Hill, Sussex (after Burstow and Holleyman, 1957: plate XVI and fig. 26).

of agricultural production and where kinship is likely to have been a major factor in structuring the socio-political order (Ellison, 1981), it is hardly surprising that political activities should focus at the level of the co-resident kin group, perhaps taking place in the context of visits for exchange or inter-household pooling of labour for tasks such as harvesting cereal crops.

If productive, political and ritual activities were largely centred on or organised through the household, it is unlikely that the domestic-public dichotomy through which male-female relationships have been articulated during parts of recent western history can be imposed on the Bronze Age. There is nothing to suggest that the domestic domain was perceived as "women's space" to the exclusion of men, nor that women did not play a role in activities that took place outside of the house. Indeed, within such small-scale agricultural economies, it is likely that all of the personnel that made up the co-resident group would have played a role in productive activities, the rituals that sustained human life and agricultural fertility, and the socio-political practices that underpinned the household economy; of course, this is not to say that the contributions of different gender groups were perceived and valued in identical ways.

Terms of Reference

Before I move on, I want to briefly explain my use of the terms "men" and "women" in this paper. These are deliberately employed to underline the idea that

social groups—at whatever level (household, neighbourhood, ethnic group, etc.)—are not unitary and homogeneous entities. The English-language literature on the Bronze Age has retained a distinctly social-evolutionary focus. Discussions of chiefly hierarchies and long-distance exchanges eclipse the local worlds of face-to-face interaction within which gendered identities were constructed on a daily basis. Within this literature, the role of those who do not conform to particular idealised notions of "manhood" drawn from our own historical context (the "warrior", for example) remains distinctly underexplored. Women, if they are mentioned at all, are characterised as passive, decorated by their fathers or husbands and exchanged as wives in attempts to form chiefly alliances.

My use of the terms "men" and "women", then, are heuristic and arise out of a desire to write other gender groups back into our accounts of the Bronze Age. Three points must be underlined here. First, we cannot assume that Bronze Age people utilised a simple binary opposition (male-female) to describe differential reproductive capacity or other perceived physical/biological differences. Second, gendered identity cannot be reduced to biological sex. For example, Sofaer Derevenski's study (1997) of some of the continental European burial data has shown that Bronze Age gendered identity shifted in complex and contextually-specific ways along such axes as age, social standing (however that may have been defined) and cultural group. Hence, if Bronze Age people recognised the generalised binary gender categories "men" and "women", these were certainly not constructed as static and unitary entities. Third, even if we do posit the existence of the categories "men" or "women" in the Bronze Age, we can in no way assume that these were defined and valued in the same way as they are today. Here, then, I use these terms simply as a means of exploring how different categories of people might have created identities for themselves within the domestic domain. As we shall see below, such identities were not static productions relating purely to dualistic models of reproductive capacity, but contextual positionings that drew on other aspects of productive, political and ritual practice.

I hope to show, therefore, that gender categories such as "men" and "women", if they existed, were not monolithic and unchanging entities into which people were firmly slotted. Rather, people positioned themselves in relation to gender discourses by espousing, rejecting and transposing the meanings associated with particular practices, places and objects. It is too simplistic to suggest, for example, that "women wove cloth during the Middle Bronze Age", although the hermeneutic approach taken below begins by suggesting exactly this. In fact, activities such as weaving evoked qualities and connotations which, in certain circumstances, people drew on to characterise particular gender groups and to locate themselves or others in relation to these idealised categories. To take an example from our own society, the cultural norms of the modern western world might lead us to expect toy swords or toy guns to mostly be used by boys, although girls will also play with such objects. When a girl plays with a toy sword, this does not

mean that she has become "a boy" or that she is trying to do so. Rather, swords evoke certain qualities that are associated with "manliness", for example courage, strength and violence. Clearly, women in our society can also possess some or all of these characteristics. Women, then, may hold within them qualities idealised as both "manly" and "womanly" (the same can be said for men). These qualities are contingently evoked through one's performance of certain activities, subtly shifting or even completely transforming the nature of one's gendered identity. In this way, then, we might say that in our society a woman's gendered identity changes depending on whether she is cooking a meal for her children, discussing business with colleagues, visiting her parents or running in a marathon, although the meanings and values associated with one domain of practice certainly spill over to have an impact on others.

In the section below, then, my account of gender relations in Middle Bronze Age Britain is not written in an attempt to produce an accurate reflection of past "reality". I choose to suggest that women played a dominant role in particular activities not because we can demonstrate this archaeologically but because this allows me to discuss some of the ways in which self-identity could have been contingently constituted within domestic space in relation to particular sets of practices. My interest is more in understanding how a building such as a roundhouse might have been understood and experienced quite differently according to one's (changing) positioning in relation to gender discourses than in producing a verifiable account of gender roles during the Middle Bronze Age. The discussion below, then, is based on a number of assumptions, but I hope that the reasoning behind this will be apparent to the critical reader. An alternative approach might be to eschew the use of the terms "man" and "woman" altogether. However, in order to construct a narrative which demonstrates the many ways in which a roundhouse might have been experienced, I have chosen to continue to use these terms as a means of distinguishing different perspectives on such buildings. All terminology is culturally-loaded in the sense that it arises out of historically-specific ways of ordering and valuing the world; retaining a self-critical stance in relation to the meaning of the interpretative categories we use will, I hope, in this case be as valuable an approach as rejecting them outright.

The Construction of Gendered Identity in the Middle Bronze Age

We know little about gender roles during the British Middle Bronze Age. For example, it has not proved possible to identify gendered dimensions to the treatment of the human body on death. Most adults were cremated; their remains were placed in ceramic vessels and buried in simple pits without elaborate grave goods (Ellison, 1980). To date, the only potential gendered axis of differentiation that has been identified is the spatial location of burial. Some Middle Bronze

Age cemeteries were inserted into or placed under mounds of earth or stone. Interestingly, McKinley (1997) notes that the central cremation burials within such mounds are more often sexed as biological females than males, although this is certainly not enough to allow the reconstruction of power relations during this period (the sample of sexed central burials is small). Furthermore, there is nothing to link specific gender groups with particular activities during life; there is no extant iconography, and archaeologists' assumptions surrounding the identity of the users or wearers of artefacts recovered from settlement contexts such as bone awls, bronze axes, shale bracelets or stone hammers are just that—assumptions.

To begin at a simplistic level, however, we may note that in many societies, activities such as weaving and the preparation of food have a strongly gendered dimension. For example, in the recent historic period, cloth production across Eurasia has largely been undertaken by women (Schneider and Weiner, 1989) and, although clearly an assumption, we might suggest that Bronze Age women were also heavily involved in this activity. If so, then the substantially increased archaeological visibility of weaving equipment during the Middle Bronze Age hints that those responsible for the production of cloth played a major role in the Bronze Age economy. Along with cloth production, women may also have been largely responsible for activities such as the grinding of grain. I shall use these suggestions as a point of entry for a narrative on Bronze Age settlement constructed within a hermeneutic interpretative framework. However, I would not wish to suggest that "womanhood" in the Bronze Age (if there was such a concept) was defined entirely in relation to such activities; rather, the meanings and values ascribed to these practices were drawn on in particular circumstances to describe certain aspects of "femaleness", although these may have been ignored or inverted in other contexts.

If we suggest that the grinding of grain was undertaken by women, then this allows us to talk about gender roles in other areas of practice. During this period, it is possible to identify a whole series of metaphorical links between the production of cereal food and the treatment of the dead (for detailed discussion, see Brück, in press). Processes of heating/burning and crushing were applied both to cereals and to the bodies of the dead. Grain was parched, ground and cooked to render it edible. Seed corn was stored in ceramic vessels before planting; often, these storage vessels were placed in pits in the ground. Similarly, cremation was the primary rite of disposal of the dead during this period. After collection from the pyre, the cremated remains were usually buried in a storage vessel, prior to which they sometimes appear to have been deliberately crushed (e.g. Everton, 1981: 186; but see McKinley, 1993). Grave goods are rare but grinding equipment is not unknown from cemetery contexts at this time. The rubbing stone or grinder found at the Knighton Heath cemetery, Dorset, is one such example (Petersen, 1981: 56), and it is possible that this item was used to transform both food and the dead as part of the funeral rite.

These similarities between the preparation of food and treatment of the dead perhaps hint that women played a primary role in funerary activities. In general, transformations mediated by heating and grinding seem to have been viewed as powerful and productive processes during this period, facilitating the regeneration of life through the harnessing of death (Brück, in press). If so, then women's ability to transform deceased relatives into ancestors or agricultural produce into nourishing food would have given them power and status in particular contexts (whether this power was viewed in positive or negative terms—or both—is more difficult to say).

We may use these observations to suggest that women's sense of value and self-identity was not simply constructed in terms of the domestic domain as we understand it today. As producers of cloth wealth which may have been used in exchange (itself a particularly important activity in the Bronze Age), particular women's fame as weavers may have spread far beyond their immediate kin group. Indeed, women may themselves have engaged in exchange either with other women or as members of wider kin groups, a possibility that is rarely countenanced in accounts of the Bronze Age, although this is well-documented ethnographically (Weiner, 1992). Alternately, if men were the main actors within exchange activities, they would nonetheless have been dependant on women for the production of much of the wealth they needed (ibid.). The complex relations of obligation and dependence in which Bronze Age men and women were no doubt enmeshed would have given each claims over the other. Turning to mortuary practices, women's role in this case would have ensured that they had the opportunity to create networks of social links with kin and neighbours outside of their own settlement. The importance of such social relationships in terms of the political order should not be underestimated. As members of particular kin groups, relations of seniority may have been established among the women of the group preparing the deceased for burial, no doubt reflected in how tasks and rights were allocated for the duration of the mortuary ceremonies. As such, women would have played an important role in the reproduction and renegotiation of the social order that surrounds death in most societies (cf. Weiner, 1992).

The different spheres of practice in which women—like men—were involved meant that womanhood was not constituted as a unitary and unchanging state. Women's experience and sense of self-identity varied according to context as would others' evaluations of them. A woman's position and perspective might change depending on whether she was preparing food for her immediate family, giving a gift of fine cloth to her visiting brother, or telling stories to neighbours as she helped to bring in their harvest about the respected relative she had buried the previous winter. Activities such as burial, food preparation, cloth production and exchange each had a series of meanings and connotations, some of which were constructed within the domestic domain and some of which were not. The domestic domain was set within a dynamic social and material landscape; meanings and

values attached to people and activities within the settlement were constructed via conceptual links with a series of other events, practices and relationships outside of the domestic context.

Of course, it may be erroneous to assume that distinct and mutually exclusive spheres of activity existed for men and women in the Middle Bronze Age. Many household activities may have been shared productive tasks to which both women and men contributed. Strathern's discussion (1988: 159–65) of the multiple authoring of Hagen pigs provides a good example of the way in which wives and husbands may play joint and complementary roles in productive activities. Although it is difficult to identify the precise roles that men and women played in household activities in the past, interesting inferences can occasionally be made. Sørensen's study (1991) of items of clothing preserved in the well-known log-coffin burials of the Danish Bronze Age provides an excellent example. Individual pieces of cloth often show a number of different weaving styles and levels of ability, suggesting that several members of the household contributed to their production (although whether this included different gender groups is unknown). In Middle Bronze Age Britain, it is possible that activities such as cloth production or the treatment of the dead were joint undertakings in which both women and men played a role, although it has not been possible to demonstrate this to date.

It is also important to remember that the products of women's and men's labour may not necessarily have been their own to give away. The web of relationships within which a person is embedded means that others may have prior claims over the objects she produces. As such, even if women were the primary producers of cloth in the Middle Bronze Age, it may not always have been possible to dispose of this exactly as they wished. This brings us back to our discussion above of relational concepts of the self. At one level, personal freedom may be curtailed by the networks of obligation that link people together. Yet, at another level, one might argue that agency is located in the sets of social relationships that make up the person; it is one's relationships with others that empower one to act in particular ways. As such, an activity such as the exchange of cloth can perhaps be seen as a locus of political negotiation. Those involved may have had a variety of different interests and agendas; options would have been weighed up and choices made depending on circumstances and on the relations between those concerned. In other words, people were not constrained to act in particular ways but chose to do so on the basis of their knowledgeable but contextually positioned understanding of events.

Architecture and Meaning

Here, I want to explore the cross-referencing between different spheres of practice a little further. People construct the world through metaphor (Tilley, 1999).

They grasp new experiences by describing these in relation to ideas they are already familiar with. The qualities of one place or artefact are evoked in terms of those of another. An artefact such as a bronze knife, then, is constituted within a network of conceptual links that provides a series of different ways for people to interpret this object. To take the example of a pot, this has a whole series of referents. In the Middle Bronze Age, the same types of pot were used to prepare food and to bury the dead, evoking a series of images of commensality, nurture and loss that crossed from one domain to the other. The rusticated decoration found on some Middle Bronze Age ceramics may make reference to basketry techniques (Ellison, 1975), calling to mind the places, people and activities with which basketry was associated. Some pots were made within the settlement itself, whereas others came from a distance (Ellison, 1981), perhaps arriving along with other gifts from allies who came to carry out marriage negotiations. Events such as these inscribe objects with a significance beyond their simple use as containers for food. Pots, like people, were broken on death; at cemeteries such as Bromfield in Shropshire, there is evidence that vessels were deliberately smashed at the pyre-side (Stanford, 1982), indicating that the lifecycle of a vessel was considered analogous at some level to that of a human being and perhaps even that certain pots may have been associated with particular people (Brück, in press). The temper added to pottery during this period included burnt flint and grog (Brown, 1995: 127; E. Morris, 1994: 38). Thus, both waste from the preparation of food, itself an evocatively transformative activity, and the remains of older, "dead" pots were used to make new containers, reminding their users of the cyclical emergence of death out of life and of the power (albeit contextual) of those who presided over ceramic production. Similar heat-mediated transformations involving fragmentation and rebirth include metallurgy and cremation (Brück in press), and this sharing of techniques reminds us of the network of conceptual links through which people, places, objects and activities are constituted.

An artefact such as a pot, then, carried a series of different symbolic meanings in the Middle Bronze Age, as did the practices in which it was used. Returning to the question of domestic space and domestic architecture, it is clear that the spatial location of activities involving objects such as pottery would not simply impart one single meaning to the building in which they took place. Rather, the range of different associations which such artefacts conjured up would lend an important element of fluidity to the interpretation of space. The networks of symbolical links within which objects were constituted provided a series of different ways for people to interpret the spaces in which these artefacts were placed. Hence, different people might have understood and experienced the same roundhouse quite differently. For women and for men, seeing a pot set down next to a hearth may have triggered quite different ideas and feelings, although the basic set of qualities and meanings ascribed to the pot by both may have been similar. These different ideas and feelings arose out of people's varying structural location in relation to

objects, activities, knowledge and the sources of social power. The roundhouse, then, was a different place depending on one's gendered identity (the same points can be made for other aspects of one's social identity too). As such, the same building could have provided a basis for the construction of a series of contextually-shifting experiences and interpretations. This happened because the roundhouse was conceptually constructed through a series of meaningful associations with contexts outside of itself, just as a person's identity and spatial experience was influenced not only by their immediate physical placement but by their memories of events, activities and people that were spatially and temporally distant.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the problems that might surround an attempt to write a phenomenology of the house in archaeology. While phenomenology provides useful insights into the construction of human experience, in archaeology at least, this approach has not as yet been able to fully penetrate the cultural specificities of the human interpretative process. Of course, phenomenology could certainly be employed to construct a range of narratives in the present, for example by involving different age, gender or class groups in the interpretative process applied to particular archaeological datasets. Yet, the extent to which archaeologists' experience of ancient settlement remains might replicate that of their erstwhile inhabitants remains highly questionable. Here, I have tried to show that "houses" in the past—as in other societies today—were very different to our own homes. I have also suggested that in the past, as in the present, different interest groups could have experienced or interpreted the same building quite differently. I have tried to consider some of the ways in which we can begin to explore this diversity of interpretation by looking at the constitution of objects and spaces within dense webs of practical and metaphorical connections that cut across the settlement and into the wider social landscape. To what extent phenomenology—as a methodology—might contribute to this interpretative process remains to be explored further.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: My thanks to Chris Fowler and to an anonymous referee for reading this paper so carefully and for providing such constructive and thought-provoking comments.

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