Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description
Tim Ingold
New York, Routledge (2011a)

Redrawing Anthropology: Materials, Movements, Lines
Tim Ingold (Ed.)
Farnham, Ashgate (2011b)

Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot
Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst (Eds.)
Farnham, Ashgate (2008)

One would easily be excused from surmising that publishing five books in five years might lead an author to lose the thread of one's thought. To my knowledge, however, no social scientist seems to have been able as of late to develop a more coherent, influential, creative, and trailblazing line of intellectual products than Tim Ingold. *Being Alive, Redrawing Anthropology*, and *Ways of Walking*—together with *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (Hallam and Ingold 2008) and the slightly older *Lines: A Brief History* (Ingold 2007)—in fact comprise a concerted and merciless attack on the representational ways of thinking, the cognitive and symbolic models, and the immobile, immaterial methods that have characterized much of twentieth century research. On the ruins' path Ingold carves a new way forward for anthropology and human geography; a ground cleared of debris by the sheer force of the materials, meshworks, and movements he skillfully employs.

On Chapter 2 of *Being Alive* Ingold invites us to pick up a common stone and hold it in our hands long enough to feel its qualities—and not its materiality. Materiality is an abstraction, he argues, it is a concept we impute to things because we do not bother to hold objects—like stones—in sufficient regard for what they are. The actual "materials, it seems, have gone missing" (2011a:20). Materials indeed are mostly absent from much anthropological and social scientific research because the symbolic qualities of the objects they make up inevitably and unduly take precedence. This causes scholars to think up imaginary attributes like agency in order to give objects a semblance of life. But upon close examination we ought to realize that materials are active: "they circulate, mix with one another, solidify and dissolve in the formation of more or less enduring things" (2011a:16). Materials are their doing, Ingold argues, and it through their qualities, movements, and force that they exert their life.

Materials have caught Ingold's attention before. In *The Perception of the Environment* (2000) Ingold argued that life is the skillful weaving together of materials: a process arising without a specific plan in the course of emergent involvement within the lifeworld. In that earlier book, following Heidegerrian inspiration, Ingold had given this involvement the name of dwelling and distinguished it from the instrumental transitivity of ends and means typical of social constructionist approaches. The fusion between ecology and phenomenology proposed in that earlier work is further developed in the later trilogy, though Ingold now argues he wishes to take distance from the "localism" connoted by dwelling, a localism that "seems out of tune with an emphasis on the primacy of movement" emphasized by his later ideas (2011a:12). Thus dwelling—at least as a moniker—is jettisoned and replaced with the more elegant concept of habitation, which better

takes into account wayfaring as “the fundamental mode by which living beings inhabit the earth” (2011a:12).

Wayfaring is a simple and elegant idea that ought to be of great interest to any student of mobilities. I myself have used it before (Vannini 2012) to distinguish the transport model of a large transit corporation—with its emphasis on scheduled movement between point A and point B—from the more localized, place-based, intransitive constellations of mobilities following lines of becoming and opening boundaries, rather than enclosing spaces within them. Wayfaring, argues Ingold, is a trail of growth and extemporaneous movement, it is “a trail along which life is lived” (2011:69). Wayfaring and its consequent carving of surfaces becomes for Ingold the basis for an ontogenesis based on movement. The lines Ingold detects are not limited to the obvious ones—like paths, roads, etc.—but also encompasses the traces left by the movement of the hand, as in weaving, drawing, writing, the spinning of cobwebs, and the building of homes.

Wayfaring therefore soon becomes a metaphor—though one with an obvious and proven material basis—for human activity and social organization. Each line, each trail winds its way through like “one strand in a tissue of trails that together comprise the texture of the lifeworld…a relational field…not of interconnected points but of interwoven lines; not a network but a meshwork” (2011a:69-70). In a cute and openly funny essay in *Being Alive* Ingold promptly distances his meshwork from the idea of the network, arguing how Latourian actor network theory and his wayfaring model are as different from one another as the activities of an ant and a spider. The network idea, he finds, entails “that the elements connected are distinguished from the lines of their connection” thus allowing for no “mutuality without prior separation” (2011a:70). On the other hand the meshwork denies the value of a distinction between things and their relations—sort of like saying that the web is one with its spider and the spider is one with its web.

The idea that life is woven together by a web of movements lies at the very epicenter of Ingold’s trilogy. Movements of all kinds are profoundly social activities which are both perceptive of the world and generative and transformative of it. In *Ways of Walking* various movements—each practiced through the feet—come together in a vibrant collection of original essays. Walking therefore becomes an act of mobility but also one of education, a practice of enskillment, a way of knowing, a process of storytelling, and a ritual of communion between the human and the more-than-human world. Walking is therefore studied for more than just its empirical value as a kinetic practice. Walking encompasses “observing, monitoring, remembering, listening, touching, crouching, climbing” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008:5) and in general making “one’s way through a world in formation, in a movement that is both rhythmically resonant with the movements of others around us—whose journeys we share or whose paths we cross—and open ended, having neither a point of origin nor any final destination” (2008:2).

Essays in *Ways of Walking* accomplish this by covering topics as diverse as hunting-gathering in Malaysian forests (by Lie Tuck-Po), ambulating with indigenous communities in Canada’s Northwest Territories (by Allice Legat), the curious activities of the followers of the Degree Confluence Project (by Thomas Widlok), religious processions in Andalusia (by Katrin Lund), and walking nowhere in particular in mundane ways (by Jo Lee Vergunst). Particularly outstanding is the chapter by Tim Edensor, who explores the practice of walking amidst industrial ruins and how it is performed improvisionally and contingently, as a form of path-making opposed to the typically constrained path-following activities of urban spaces.

The weaving together of life by a variety of kinetic practices continues in *Redrawing Anthropology*, an edited collection aimed at stimulating the imagination of anthropologists and ethnographers alike. Ingold begins his introduction with a curious-looking drawing: a swoosh-like zig-zag line which, he tells us, is a salmon. When prompted to draw a fish most of us would draw an oval body and add fins, tails, and a head marked by the typical gluttony-gullible expression of a fish. But Ingold suggests instead that to draw life as contained within clear lines of demarcation, lines which encapsulate and contain a body, is to draw death, because bodies are open to the lifeworld and move along with it, not inside of it. Much of ethnographic writing and anthropological research ends up, instead, focusing on things that are stable, static, completed. Drawing a fish as the line of its movements re-enlivens the object of research as it sensitizes us to understand life as an unfinished process of growth and movement.

Several of the contributors to *Redrawing Anthropology* follow Ingold's incitation closely. Stephanie Bunn, for example, guides us through the evolution of materials in the making of as a "Turk's Head Knot," whereas Brenda Farnell and Robert Wood sketch out the performance of dance moves. Choosing a more theoretical but equally germane route Carl Knappett tackles in depth the distinction between objects and things, and networks and meshworks, while Maxine Sheets-Johnstone dissects the linear qualities of movement in a powerful essay on life as kinesthesia. A possibly somewhat frustrating aspect of the edited collection is the relative paucity of actual drawings. Amanda Ravetz's art-trained hand stands out vigorously, however, as an example of the more-than-representational power of sketching.

Ingold's contribution to anthropological theory is un-measurable and the legacy of his work to the development of non-representational thought will undoubtedly be long-lasting. This much we have come to expect of him. But what will perhaps be surprising to any of his new readers is the lucid tone with which his writing accomplishes his convincing goals. Ingold writes clearly, cleanly, and with character. As a good anthropologist he also regularly draws upon a good variety of ethnographic research to build his arguments. This is a rarity in the contemporary world of theory, in which the critical reading of novels, trendy movies, and the disdain accompanying the political events of the day passes for research—making the cultural theorist sound more like a Sunday morning newspaper reader in desperate search for the next clever neologism. If there is one wish with which the reader of his work leaves unfulfilled is for Ingold's own fieldwork. One can only hope that is atop his list of future projects.

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