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# Wayfaring thoughts: Life, Movement and Anthropology

Interview with Professor T. Ingold

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- 1 In the last few years, several research groups of the Urban Anthropology Nucleus (NAU) approached the array of issues addressed by British anthropologist Timothy Ingold. Those issues are considered to be transversal to different approaches and objects of NAU as well as deeply inspiring to new ways of thinking the relationships between city, ethnology, body and consciousness. This growing interest aroused among other research groups too, within and beyond the University of São Paulo, as well as the will to include Ingold's work in graduate and undergraduate courses, something often restrained by language limitations. Addressing those demands, we've published in *Ponto Urbe* Portuguese translations of "Stop, Look and Listen. Vision, hearing and human movement" (year 2, no. 03, July 2008) and "People like us'. The concept of the anatomically modern human" (year 5, no. 09, December 2011).
- 2 In 2011, Tim Ingold came to Brazil for several meetings in Brasília, Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre. The Porto Alegre meeting resulted in the book *Cultura, Percepção e Ambiente – diálogos com Tim Ingold* [Culture, Perception and Environment – dialogues with Tim Ingold], organized by Carlos Alberto Steil and Maria Cristina de Moura Carvalho. This book is part of the *serie Antropologia Hoje*, an association between NAU and Terceiro Nome press.
- 3 Some NAU researchers decided to attend Ingold's conferences at Minas Gerais Federal University, asking Tim Ingold to give us an interview, so he could present himself to Brazilian anthropology students with his own words. We've made contact with Tim Ingold and with the Cátedras IEAT committee, through Professor Ana Gomes, to whom we thank the kindness and generous aid. In order to carry on the interview, Ana Leticia de Fiori, José Agnello Andrade and Yuri Bassichetto Tambucci organized a sequence of Ingold's work readings and produced a script. The trip to Belo Horizonte was sponsored by NAU.

At Belo Horizonte, Adriana Queiroz Testa and Alice Haibara, researchers of the CEStA/USP [Amerindian Studies Center] joined the interview team.

- 4 The interview took place at the FAFICH facilities, on October 05, 2011. Ingold had just spoken to a huge audience, crowded with social science, architecture, music and pedagogy students and teachers. We went to a research room, at a round table, where we talked for over an hour about his academic background and the beginning of his interest in anthropology; the concepts presented in his work; his relation with Lévi-Strauss and Latour; and contemporary anthropology dilemmas, facing the risks of yielding to a descriptive ethnography and losing its speculative dimension. Ingold enthusiastically answered us, mindful of our questions and concerned with being understood, even with our linguistic missteps. We would have liked to spend the whole afternoon learning and thinking with Tim Ingold, but we were reminded by our hosts that we should let him have his lunch before the afternoon activities. So, we ended the interview with an invitation for him to come back to Brazil soon, to discover next time our environment at São Paulo as well.

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**PONTO.URBE** – We were instructed by more experienced people to start this interview by asking about your academic trajectory. But as we were reading the fourth chapter of "Lines: a brief history" we thought we could take this chapter as a starting point, because we understand that you do a sort of archeology of genealogical lines. There you are pointing to the use of hydraulic and arboricultural metaphors as they stream, flow, grow... And then, in the book there is this drawing of growing and interlacing and overlapping lines as a proposal of thinking about family histories. We would like you to talk about your academic path in Cambridge, Helsinki and Aberdeen as a family line, a growing line.

**T. Ingold** - Well, where to start? I was brought up in a household in which my father was a scientist, a botanist. In fact, he was a mycologist, a student of fungi. I was brought up in this house where I could see my father everyday working with his microscope on our dining room table and he would draw the fungi spores, which could only be seen in the microscope. He would draw these spores on a white board, with ink and a mapping pen, making very beautiful pictures. So I grew up with that sense of science as something you do in a very homely way, involving observation and drawing. And I think that is somehow very deeply embedded in the way I think, although my father always thought of himself as just an empirical scientist, with nothing to do with all this anthropological stuff and doesn't understand it. But still, he loves his fungi.

But then at school I was good at mathematics, and interested in science. I had a very inspiring science teacher. And so I just assumed that I would go on to university to study science, natural science. In Britain before you go to university you take what is called advanced level subjects, so the specialization starts very early, I was only fourteen when I was choosing my subjects. So I went to Cambridge to do the natural sciences, and after a year of that, I decided that I couldn't be a scientist. Not because I was bad at it, but because I felt that science had become such a large, hierarchical and authoritarian structure and there wasn't any room to breathe in it. And I thought that I would like to go into a subject that was in the same stage of development that science was at the time of Galileo. I did not want to suffer as Galileo did, but I thought I could be the Galileo of anthropology. And also at that time, there was, and there still is, an enormous division in the university between the natural sciences, on the one hand, and

the arts and humanities, on the other. And I felt that I was looking for a possible subject that I could study that would help to bridge and transcend that division. And there were two alternatives available at Cambridge: one was anthropology and the other was philosophy and history of science. And I could have gone either way, but I was attracted to anthropology because of the fact that it involved some kind of engagement with actual people, rather than just an ivory tower of speculation. So that is why, in the end, I decided to do anthropology. So the reasons I went into anthropology is that I felt that we needed to transcend this division between the sciences and the humanities. Those are still the reasons why I do anthropology and think anthropology is important. The way I see anthropology is that it lies on a crossroads of the division between the humanities and the natural sciences, on the one hand, and the division between the theoretical speculations about what human life could be like, and the empirical observation of what human life is like, somewhere, sometime. Anthropology is caught at that crossroads and that is what makes it exciting, and I still think that is the case.

But I have been a little depressed by the extent to which anthropology has split between its biological and sociocultural divisions. And also the extent, in Britain and to some extent in North America, to which anthropology has retreated into ethnography and taken its task to be one of ethnographic description. Not that there is anything wrong with ethnography, but that leaves out the speculative element. I think that anthropology has got to be speculative about what the possibilities of human life could be. And if that speculation is left out, we end up with a discipline that is not very well able to speak out in a context where other disciplines, such as psychology, economics, history, are able to make big platforms for themselves. So that is why I still do anthropology.

One day I will write an introductory book, and I know that I'm going to call it: "Coming Home, An Anthropological Odyssey". Because I have the feeling that the popular stereotype of anthropology is that people go away to a distant place to find out odd things. My feeling about anthropology is actually that it is a lifelong effort to bring things back home again and to find out both who you are and about the world at the same time. So, my path, in that sense, is one of coming back home and finding myself. Finding a way of writing that seems to be me writing and not only somebody playing academic games. Does that begin to answer your question?

**PONTO.URBE-** It raises a whole array of new questions, especially because here in Brazil there is a growing number of indigenous people coming to the academic area and studying anthropology to study their own people. So it is a different process of coming home as well...

**T. Ingold** - Yes, indeed. And that is something that is a big difference between anthropology here, that I am only just learning about, and anthropology in Britain, because we have lots of different groups of people, we are a multiethnic society, but we don't really have indigenous populations so we haven't had to cope with that sort of situation. Usually anthropologists are going from Britain to study wherever in the world or just to study in Britain. But it has not been the same issues that you have here, or they have in Canada, with first nations people, or in Australia with aboriginal populations. It makes a big difference, I think, to the way that anthropology portrays itself and in its position in the academy as well.

**PONTO.URBE** - Actually, the questions you raise in your texts about what is indigenous status and who is a native and how long you have to be in the land...we actually have these issues as well, because state policy considers that the indigenous people are only "natives"

if they are in an indigenous territory, a land that the state has recognized as such. If they are in the cities, for example, they are considered "less indigenous". If they are studying at the university, they are considered "less indigenous". So we have interesting issues. For example, when indigenous students come to the university to study anthropology, will they be able to study their own... will they be able to "come back home" or is academic anthropology as a discipline so rigid and inflexible that actually their ways of knowing, traditional indigenous ways of knowing, are not involved? And they forget their ways of knowing or think that they are less legitimate? So, we are in a very interesting moment...

**T. Ingold** - It is quite tricky. I think that the base line is that we are all indigenous people of the planet. I worked with Sami people in northern Finland, and I think that a bit earlier, historically, these issues were coming to our head in the 1970s and 1980s in that part of the world, but it is exactly the same problem. How many indigenous ancestors did one have to have, and some people were considered more indigenous than others, and there were areas that you could be to have rights, some sort of rights: to herd reindeer or to fish... and one thing led to another. The problem is that it creates a boundary, creates a further problem... they thought that to solve this problem, they ought to make a finer division and then to solve that one make an even finer division and it just becomes absurd! So it is a problem.

**PONTO.URBE** – Bearing in mind this beautiful image you mentioned, your father working at home, hunched over his microscope and a drawing paper, we would like to know how is the process of recording data in the field.

**T. Ingold** - When I first did my fieldwork, that was a long time ago, the sorts of things that are being talked about in anthropology now were not even on the horizon. I had been trained to go along and study kinship, how household economics was managed, how people adapted to their environments, and all this sort of thing. So, I kind of did what I was told; I did my fieldwork and then I came home and I wrote it up. And I don't think I ever gave any serious thought at that stage as to whether this was anthropology or ethnography, or what the relationship between the two was, or anything like that. But, the funny thing is that, although when I did my fieldwork I was concentrated on the things I thought I was supposed to concentrate on, still, there are things you absorb, without realizing it, under the skin. It can take twenty years, or that sort of period of time, for you to suddenly realize what it was that you learned, or what people were really trying to tell you, when they were telling you this or that. So, I've caught myself thinking, or saying to myself: "*Why am I thinking about this stuff now, why am I thinking about all this stuff about wayfaring and movement, and so on?*" And then I realized that, actually, I learned it all during my first fieldwork. That I'm only now beginning to realize the significance of it, because it takes that long for it to sink in and for other things to happen in anthropology to make things visible that weren't visible to me then.

I think that's a very common experience of people doing fieldwork, that the most fundamental aspects of their life in the field only become significant at a much later stage. But that's actually one reason why I wanted to move away from the idea that you do ethnography in the field, and then you do anthropology later on, because I really don't like the tendency to treat ethnography as a method or a tool that we use. It seems to me that ethnography is a task of description: if you're doing ethnography, you're setting out to describe the life of a people with as much accuracy and truth as you can, and that's fine. But to treat that, then, as just a first stage to something else which is anthropology, which is somewhat comparative and theoretical is to diminish that descriptive task, as if it were just collecting data. It's harmful for ethnography as well,

to be treated as a method. And it's harmful for anthropology, because we forget what anthropology is really about, I think, an exploration of the conditions and possibilities of human life in the world. We do that in the field, but we might not realize we're doing it until sometime later, but it is what we do. We can't help doing it in the field, actually. If you're living in the field situation, you can't help doing that. It just happens.

**PONTO.URBE** – There are some anthropologists in Brazil who say that what indigenous people do, in their ways of knowing, in their practices of seeking to know other peoples, that's anthropology as well. They see anthropology in a wider sense, not only as a discipline, but as ways of relating, knowing and living together. Do you think you would agree with that?

**T. Ingold:** I partially would. Yes, in the sense that anthropology is more than just an academic discipline, it's a vocation or way of life, but there's a little thing in me that says: "yes, but...", actually, anthropology is an academic discipline, and like any discipline it's a certain craft of thinking, and it's produced some very, very good results, very good work. We should nurture and nourish that, and probably it's not helpful then to say: "Well, anthropology that's just life, isn't it?"

And what makes anthropology different from just life? I think it's what I and others have called the "sideways glance", and what makes fieldwork hard work is that, normally, just going through life, you just carry on and deal with things as they come. If you're doing anthropology, you're doing that, but you're also always looking over your shoulder and saying: "Yes, but this is the way things are done here. Why are other people doing things in a different way?" Or, perhaps, you're thinking at a meta-level: suppose you're just walking along in ordinary life, and say: "Well, I'm walking along, I want to visit this place, I want to walk". If you're an anthropologist, you suddenly say: "But how is it possible that I can walk? It's certainly an extraordinary thing". Or you look around you and say: "Well, I see a landscape, I see a hill, I see trees", but the anthropologist says: "Wait a moment, I can see!" And the anthropological question is that one. That things that seem absolutely ordinary and normal become questions. And in the field I think we investigate those questions with the people among whom we work, who are often very perplexed by those issues as well, and we have interesting discussions, as everybody knows.

**PONTO.URBE** - We've had contact with the books: "The Perception of the Environment" and "Lines", mostly, and they are selections of essays and lectures that you produced in a lot of different contexts. And, while reading these texts, we can feel the concern with getting the reader close to the speech performance, especially in "Lines". We can feel this while we're reading, and we're always commenting about it, because it is a pleasure to read. We can imagine you moving around and gesticulating while the argument unfolds. In the same way, we thought that your book can be read in several directions: onwards and backwards, skipping chapters and coming back, so it's not a straight and direct strand of thought. We can think of a book as well as a meshwork of lines that we have to wayfare through, especially because we have our own questions and topics in mind while we're reading. So, we argued about whether we can put the question in terms of form and content, but it came out like this: how do you see the relation between form and content in the writing style of your anthropological production?

**T. Ingold** - First, I would say that the fact that when you read it sounds as though I'm talking to you is because these texts originated as lectures, but also because I do like to write that way. To me the sound of a sentence means a lot. So you read what you've written, and ask yourself if even things like the prosody, the emphasis on particular syllables, sound right. And I want to fiddle around with a sentence until I've got

something that, when I read it out, it has the right sound. And that's why, I think, there is a connection between my writing and music, because music teaches you to concentrate on prosody and rhythm and so on. I find that I'm doing the same in my writing and that's really important to me. So, I read stuff out to myself and check if it sounds okay, and if it doesn't, then something needs to be fixed. So, in terms of the form, it is really a form that is designed to be read out loud.

But the form-content distinction is a bit problematic because I don't have the content already made to put into the form. It's when you write that your ideas emerge out of the writing process. That's the same for everybody I think. There's this myth about Mozart, that he had the whole symphony in his head and just wrote it out, but I think it's a myth and I don't believe it's true. But with any mortal person, whether it's in music or in academic writing, you're putting something down and your imagination is always running a little bit ahead, pulling you along, and often the problem when you're writing how to catch these ideas before they slip away. It can be very stressful: it's like they're all coming out, and I'm going to lose them. It's like you've had such a wonderful dream and then you've forgotten the damn thing! So you've really got to catch them quickly before they run away. And in that sense, the form seems to emerge, and curiously then you end up with something that looks as though it has a structure, but one senses that you have discovered this structure and not imposed it. Many artists say the same thing, sculptures say that they are discovering the form in the material, it was there all along and their job was just to bring it out.

It is very odd, you see, I'm writing this book, but I don't seem to be in control; the book is actually, or whatever I'm writing, is imposing its own form on me. But that is also slightly reassuring because if you're writing an academic book and you're trying to say something about the way things are, then, if you know you're discovering it, and you know that you're not actually just imposing your own content onto the form, but maybe, you have discovered something about the way things are because the book insists on writing itself in that particular way, and if things were differently it would insist on something else. So, it's some sort of reassurance that maybe you're getting there. Does that answer the question about form and content?

Writing is the most mysterious process, and it's like an exponential problem: when you sit down to start writing something, there's this terrifying blank piece of paper and you don't know where to start, and the first things you put down you think, "This is hopeless, I don't know what I'm talking about, there's nothing here" and it goes on for some time like that and you start one thing and you get stuck, and you start over and get stuck again. But, somehow, magically, after many attempts, somehow it begins to take off, and a bit more, and a bit more, and then: whoooof! It takes off and all you can do is to catch the ideas fast enough to get them down. It's very, very strange and there's something kind of magic about it.

**PONTO.URBE** - How do you produce your texts? Do you handwrite?

**T. Ingold** - I much prefer to handwrite, but I find more and more that I'm doing it on the word processor and I'm angry with myself, because the word processor is nothing more than a shortcut, that's what it is: a short cut that makes editing easier and things like that. But, when I'm really writing something that I feel comes from the heart, I feel I need to write it by hand. Partly, because I'm a hopeless typist, I use two fingers and make typing mistakes all the time. It's just frustrating. I don't make spelling mistakes when I write by hand, but I do when I type. I also find that I begin to get myself into it,

but, like everybody else, I'm so pushed for time, these days, that I end up having to use the word processor because I'm in a hurry. It's not good. It's not good to be having to do your craft in a hurry, but we're forced into that situation more and more in the universities.

**PONTO.URBE** - There are different skills involved when you're handwriting...

**T. Ingold** - Very different! I think I've got something here that I've handwritten. This is a paper that I'm going to present in Porto Alegre, and it looks like this [shows us a sheaf of unlined papers, completely taken by writing in beautiful calligraphy and some erasures]. So, I wrote this, but you know, several pages have been written several times over, and that's why they look fairly used. Then, I put little things written in the margin that I need to think a little more about, this and that, but that's what it looks like.

I ask my students, partly, because the university bureaucracy has all these instructions about how everything has to be submitted in Times New Roman, 12 point, just to be subversive, I say: "Please, submit something written by hand". So I encourage them to write by hand and then to reflect about the difference between the experience of writing by hand and on a keyboard. They all say that they feel more closely connected to what they're writing, or what they're writing about if they're writing by hand. And I think handwriting is like song; it has a melodic quality, which is completely lost in the typed version, in the modulations of the line.

**PONTO.URBE** - We were thrilled by the idea of a difference between knowledge that grows and knowledge that is assembled, because we really think that when we are computer writing or type writing, it's like a lego toy.

**T. Ingold** - Yes, it's like lego, you're building it up, rather than weaving it along. In architecture there's this distinction between what's called tectonics and stereotonics. Stereotonics is about building things up from blocks and tectonics is about weaving. Many people around the world basically weave their houses, but there's a lot of architecture built upon the assumption that there are things like building blocks that you put together just like legos. There's a tension between the two that's really interesting; it's something I'm working on now.

**PONTO.URBE** - You can see that in São Paulo, for example, in the poor neighbourhoods, because they're always building their houses...

**T. Ingold** - Weaving stuff in...

**PONTO.URBE** - Supporting each other in the other houses and building another floor, and then the public office comes around and says: "*No, it's too much of a risk to fall*". So they come with their big demolition machines...

**T. Ingold** - To ensure that they will fall...

**PONTO.URBE** - And they make very aesthetic and straight buildings, but the people always find a way to change it after a while.

Going back to the subject of writing, you talked about getting your students to write by hand, and giving them this opportunity to relate to writing. In your lecture, "Anthropology is not Ethnography", you suggest that even if anthropologists spend most of their time with their students inside a classroom, the students and classrooms are in fact seen as something apart from the anthropological practice, which is done among fellow anthropologists and natives. So, what is the role of anthropological practice inside the classroom and of the classroom in anthropology? How do you think and carry on your anthropological work in relation with your students?

**T. Ingold** - Well, I feel very strongly about this one and my experience has been that most of the ideas I've ever gotten have come from interaction with students and



discussions after lectures, editorials or whatever, or just going out for a walk. These discussions have been hugely productive, but in the anthropological literature these students are never credited for their ideas. So, if you read an article, you'll find in it references to the author and the date, in the bibliography at the end, and we're all told that you have to do this; rules about citations, and so on. But it never seems to occur to anybody that one should ever refer to any input that might happen to come from students. This seems to me to be wrong, given that most anthropologists are professional educators; they work in universities or institutions of higher education, and probably, in their lives, spend much more time in the classroom, than any time they ever spend either in the field or in academic conferences and seminars. So to speak, I think there's a similarity between what's happening with students now and what happened in the bad old days when informants were held back, they were just the natives. In the bad old days, you'd go and sit on the veranda and get the natives to give you all the information and their artefacts, and then you'd come back and the natives would disappear. They weren't credited with anything. Now, we've had a change in anthropology that it's now conventional for the people themselves to be treated as research collaborators, almost on the par with the anthropologist him or herself, but we still don't credit the students.

So, the way I see it is as that there are two or more parallel fields in which anthropological knowledge grows: there's the field of your interactions in the fieldwork, there's the interactions with your colleagues and there's the interactions with students. And these fields overlap because people you work with in the field can also be academic collaborators, can also be students, so they're not mutually exclusive. So we have a conversation that grows out of the classroom, that grows out of seminars and conferences and one that grows out of fieldwork, and these conversations weave around one another. That's what anthropological knowledge comes from.

So I see that the classroom is just another place where we can do anthropology, not a place where I am imparting this thing, whatever it is, anthropological knowledge, to them, who haven't got it.

The trouble is that there's a massive contradiction between what we as anthropologists know about how learning takes place and the motto of teaching and learning we use in our own professional practice. So we sit there in front of a class, lecturing at them, telling people that the way people learn in society is not what I'm doing now. And it's crazy. So we need to change our academic practice, but it's become a more complicated problem now because of IT. The use of IT in educational settings has changed the nature of our practice anyway, and in some ways I think it's made it more difficult, but maybe in other ways it's enhanced it.

**PONTO.URBE** - Then, how can we think about enskillment with anthropological teaching?

**T. Ingold** - One of the finest texts, I refer to it in the article "Anthropology is not Ethnography", is the essay by C. Wright Mills on the sociological imagination. It was first written in the 1950's. C. Wright Mills was a great American sociologist, a critic of Talcott Parsons. And that book, "The Sociological Imagination", has an appendix at the back, called "On Intellectual Craftsmanship" and it's the best thing I think that has ever been written about how academic work is the practice of a craft and how enskillment takes place in it. He explains about how the scholar works toward the perfection of a craft and how that is also, at the same time, the perfection of the self. Which means that you don't get perfect, but you work towards it. I think it is very beautifully put and

I think that's how enskillment happens in scholarship.

Most practicing scholars would agree with that and have no particular problems with it, but we're operating in an institutional situation, which is telling us all the time that knowledge is simply information and that our job is to pass it on using Information Technology, where appropriate, and where skill is really reduced to something you could pick up in a couple of hours, getting skilled in powerpoint, or something like this. So, it's difficult. I just notice that in many different fields now there is a move back towards a revaluation of skill. In art, for example, everybody's getting interested in drawing again. Things like this are happening that give cause for hope.

**PONTO.URBE** - We at the University of São Paulo have a large influence of Lévi-Strauss.

**T. Ingold** - Oh, I've heard.

**PONTO;URBE** - Lévi-Strauss is probably one of the most discussed and taught authors in Brazil, with different approaches, of course. We were trying to figure out some points of confluence between both of your reflections and theoretical architecture about the relations between senses and cognition. You consider that Lévi-Strauss's conception about the relations between mind and world are rather static, you wrote that in "The Perception of the Environment", as it is only the information that moves across them. And, on the other hand, in your account, organisms and environment are in mutual relation transforming each other as they move along. Was Lévi-Strauss an important reference for your theoretical discussion about the relations between senses and cognition? If you could explain a little bit of how you explore this relationship... or demolish it.

**T. Ingold** - When I was a student at Cambridge, one of my teachers was Edmund Leach. And Edmund Leach was, at that time, in the very late 1960's, introducing Lévi-Strauss's ideas to Britain, and he would be lecturing to us about this great Lévi-Strauss. We were reading *Le Pensée Sauvage* and things like that. And I remember, as an under-graduate, getting tremendously excited by all this, like a kind of notion where anthropology and mathematics could be almost the same thing. So, in essence, Lévi-Strauss was important in my intellectual formation right at the beginning.

Many years later, I found myself in the situation of teaching a course to second year students in anthropology at the University of Manchester, a course on culture and society, so I went through all the big theories and it was structured mostly on Mauss, Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss. I was teaching students on Lévi-Strauss, and they just could not stand this Lévi-Strauss. They found him pompous, incomprehensible, didn't connect with their experience of the world at all. I thought this was very interesting, because, as an undergraduate, when I encountered Lévi-Strauss, I didn't know anything more about anthropology, I think I was a second year student, and I didn't know very much about anthropology, and yet I found it enormously exciting and so did my fellow students.

In Manchester, twenty years later, I could generate no enthusiasm for Lévi-Strauss at all. But these were students who were in their second year, who knew just a little bit about anthropology, but not very much. So I thought, it must be that things that have changed in the wider intellectual environment that have completely overturned the kind of reception it had.

I taught this course for several years, and every year I taught it, I found it more and more difficult to justify why I had Lévi-Strauss in there at all. After a while, I thought: "Why am I teaching this? It's not going anywhere". I think then, I more or less decided that, if you happen to be interested in North or South American mythology, then there is something there in Lévi-Strauss. But, beyond that, I found a lot of his writing

incredibly confused, this art stuff and some of the essays in “Structural Anthropology”, where he is talking about picking up ideas from cybernetics and so on. He completely misunderstands Saussure, he completely misunderstands the distinction between synchrony and diachrony and mixes it up with *langue* versus *parole*. It is careless! And I ended up getting more and more angry with Lévi-Strauss, because I thought, he might be very good when it comes to myth, but when it comes to theory it was just careless work. He wasn't really looking at what he was doing, and not even then bothering to present it in a way that would make sense to anybody else. And I do remember, as a post-graduate, when I was doing my PhD in Cambridge and Lévi-Strauss came across to give, what was called the “Frazer Lecture”. He presented in Oxford and me and a group of my peers from Cambridge went to listen to the great man. And he stood in the Radcliffe Theatre in Oxford, there was a huge audience... and it was completely incomprehensible, and everyone said “what is this?”

So, Lévi-Strauss doesn't figure very high in my estimation, but I still often go back to *Le Pensée Sauvage* and the ideas about *bricolage*, and the distinction between *bricolage* and engineering, and there is something there that I find helpful. But I have, for example, a long running conversation, a friendly conversation, with Philippe Descola in Paris. And Philippe Descola is called the heir to Lévi-Strauss, he carries the mantle of it, but we think very similarly about many things, about animism, about landscape and so on. But I keep saying to Philippe: “You would say what I say if you didn't have this Lévi-Strauss bearing down upon you” and sometimes he says “Well, maybe that's true”. [Laughs]

**PONTO.URBE** - Professor, we would like to ask about another interaction, first Lévi-Strauss, and now Bruno Latour. You talked about your relationship with his concepts and his theory in your lecture today. In “Perceptions of the Environment” and “Lines”, when you speak about non-humans, you are usually referring to animals and other living organisms. Latour, on the other hand, uses the term non-human to include animals, objects and spirits as a fundamental part of social theory; the entities that he considers non-humans are usually seen as non-living.

**T. Ingold** - There are many parallels between the conclusions that I arrive at and the conclusions that Latour arrives at. We are both destabilizing the dichotomy between Society and Nature, we are both thinking in terms of whether a network is the same of a meshwork or different. It depends on which page of Latour you happen to be reading, because he moves backwards and forwards. But there are many points and areas where there is similarity, but we come from different places and that accounts for some of the differences. He comes from science studies, so the early ethnographic work was in a science laboratory, as in “Science in Action”, and I've come from ecological anthropology, working with reindeer herdsman, having gone through a phase of studying human-animal relations. So, we come from very different starting points, and I think that it accounts for many of the differences. I don't know how fundamental these differences really are, but I think they can be explained very much in terms of the different starting points that we have.

I have several objections to Latour, but I particularly object to this blanket use of the non-human and I think that a theory that attributes equal weight to a speed bump or a key or a gun, he has written about all those things: there's a bell and a key, and there's a man and a gun in “Pandora's' Box”, and there's a speed bump somewhere or another, but a theory that attributes the same ontological weight to a speed bump or a gun or a key as is given to a living creature gives us a seriously reductionist view of what life is.

I don't see how you can invoke a principal of symmetry, I mentioned it briefly this

morning, in which a grain of sand and a mite, they might weigh the same, but we are dealing with something fundamentally different, and that difference then for me is bound up with a focus on developmental processes, that I think is crucial. Developmental processes, processes of growth, maturation, decay and decomposition are fundamental to what I understand by life. I think that simply talking about anything as an actant loses that sense of what life is and I don't find a sense of what life is in Latour, not what I understand it to be, anyway.

Of course, Latour is taken in all sorts of different directions and many of them are directions that he himself would want to disown, so there are many people who say that Latour's point is that non-humans can have agency. But it's not quite as simple as that. So, it's quite difficult to criticize Latour because, whatever way you do it, you end up with a particular caricature of what he says. And that is because he is always changing what he says, or saying actually what he said before, as well, meaning something else, and I shouldn't object to that because I change what I say, too. But I do find that one moment he's saying actor-network isn't a theory and is not actually about networks and the next moment he's saying that actually it is a theory and it is about networks, so I have difficulties with it.

**PONTO.URBE** - Organic life is actually important in your theory, pointing to a difference between dwelling and occupation, between wayfaring and transporting, between meshwork and network. Can you describe to us your characterization of life and its importance in your theory?

**T. Ingold** - I would define life as the name for what is going on in the field of relationships within which organic forms emerge, develop and are held in place, that is what I understand as a life process. And I don't find that in Latour's understanding of the actor-network. I think, like I said yesterday, if you reduce life to agency and things to objects you effect a double reduction.

**PONTO.URBE** - In the first lecture that you gave here, you mentioned that the idea of taskscape was something that you wish you hadn't talked about and I see that in Brazilian anthropology many people are inspired by the idea of taskscape, so we would like to know why you wish you hadn't used taskscape and if there is something more interesting in its place.

**T. Ingold** - It's probably because people pick it up and use it in a rather mechanical way, but actually there's a simple reason and there's a more complicated one. The simple reason is that I actually invoked the term as part of an argument, the purpose of which was to show why we don't need it. In other words, in that argument, I set up a distinction between landscape and taskscape. The movement of the argument then was to show how you can't have such a distinction. If you temporalize the landscape, then landscape and taskscape are one. But of course people read taskscape and they thought: "this is nice. Well, we've got a landscape here and a taskscape there", and they missed the whole point of it. When I invoked the concept, it was to get rid of it. And perhaps then to come up with a more dynamic sense of what landscape is, which would be a taskscape at the same time.

So that is one reason why I regret having used it. And the other is an argument against the proliferation of these -scape words anyway. You know, they've taken over: there are ethnoscares, soundscapes, every kind of -scape. And I looked into this because I was wondering where does this come from, and I found that art historians, particularly, were engaging in an etymological confusion, when they were thinking that -scape meant something to do with scopic, and therefore with projection. Actually, they come

from completely different roots: -scape comes from *sceppan*, which means "to shape", and that comes from a germanic old english root; scope comes from *skopos*, which comes "to target", like when you shoot an arrow, and it comes from a greek root. So, they've actually got nothing to do with one another. But, nevertheless, the sense in which -scape is used is one in which form is being projected into appearance, and I've been trying to move away from the idea of projection to an idea of gathering or weaving, and in doing that I want to get away from -scapes in general, so taskscape was a bad word for what I wanted to convey anyway because I'm talking about an interweaving of tasks. I don't know what word I would use instead, but anyways it has come out as meshwork now. It's the same thing, but better expressed I think, because of the interweaving of different tasks that's goes on.

**PONTO.URBE** – There's an idea of involvement and engagement, but not projection...

**T. Ingold** - Yes, not projection. And do you know why I first thought of it? It was in the context of a lecturing to our introductory students. I was doing our introductory Anthropology 101 lectures, and I wanted to introduce to the students and to give them a sense of what it is when we say we study social life. And I found another picture of Bruegel, not the one that is in the taskscape article "The Harvesters", but another one which is a picture of a scene of a village festival and there are houses and streets, and the streets are thronged with people, and people are all doing different things: playing games, fighting, fooling about, they're having a performance here, and all this stuff's going on, and I put that up on the screen and said: "This is what we study, see all these tasks going on, we've got a taskscape". It was like that, and so they understood that this is what social life looks like. And that's where the concept originated from.

**PONTO.URBE** – But if you think that there is that problem with "landscape", it's a bit difficult to understand the difference between "environment" and "landscape".

**T. Ingold** - But that is a problem, in "Perceptions of the Environment", I tried to argue that there was a distinction and that environment was defined in a sense functionally and landscape formally. So, environment is defined in terms of what an organism does and landscape is defined in terms of forms. But the more I thought about it, the more that distinction didn't seem really to hold. So, in the end, I said: "Well, I'll stick with environment and just drop landscape". I just stopped using landscape for quite a while, but then I started having problems with environment, because once I started thinking of an organism with the environment around it, I had a problem. Because I thought: "what is this word going to mean?". And I didn't have an alternative, so I was a bit stuck with that. And, at the same time, I was having discussions with the historical geographer, Kenneth Olwig, who has written a lot of wonderful work about landscape, and he was convincing me that really I've got to hold on to this concept of landscape, that it is important from a geographical point of view. So, then I got back to writing about landscape again. I still think maybe there is room for a concept of landscape, but it's a very bad idea to generalize it to account for other kinds of -scapes, and particularly I don't think that words like soundscape make sense, but that's another argument.

**PONTO.URBE** - We have difficulties understanding which elements can be conceived as organism and which can be conceived as environment. In Perceptions of the Environment you invoke an example of houses and trees and we can't really distinguish which one is an

environment and which one is an organism. Could you talk a bit about these concepts and how they relate to each other?

**T. Ingold** - But that is actually how it should be, because in the end there isn't a clear distinction between one and the other, and you might perhaps think of the organism as a nexus, or a center, or a place where things are going on, and the best analogy that I can think of is of going back to landscape. Imagine a landscape, there are different villages here and there, and you can travel from one village to another. If you go from one place here to another place there, there is no point in which you can say "Am I still in this place, or am I in that place now, have I crossed some kind of boundary?". You know when you are in this place, because the world looks the way it does from there, and you know you are in that place, because the world looks the way it does from there. You don't have to, in order to differentiate one place from another, you don't have to draw a boundary in any way. The landscape itself is continuous, so you can think of life as a continuous landscape, in that sense, and you can think of every organism as a particular place in the landscape, and it is the organism it is because of where it is situated.

Actually, George Herbert Mead, in the 1930's, wrote about social life in just the same way. He said that the individual, or the person, is the person he or she is because of where he or she stands in relation to the network of which he or she is a part.

**PONTO.URBE** - This makes us think of a center of perception, as well.

**T. Ingold:** A center of perception, yes. It's a center, but it doesn't have to have a boundary.

**PONTO.URBE** - And from what I've understand that you've written, it's not fixed, it moves along as well.

**T. Ingold** - It moves along, yes.

**PONTO.URBE** - Is it possible that, perhaps, the other beings are the environment for us, and that we are also the environment for them?

**T. Ingold** - Of course! If we're going to use this word environment, then it's got to be everything that isn't you. So, right now, you're part of my environment and I'm part of yours.

**PONTO.URBE** - But, it also constitutes us as well...

**T. Ingold** - It constitutes us, absolutely. So, this is always work in progress, and what we have is just this relational field, or what you want to call it. So, in the end, environment is a bit of a difficult word, but I don't know what else to use.

**PONTO.URBE** - Because of the way we visualize it, or the way science visualizes it, is what makes it so complicated.

**T. Ingold** - Yes, and there's the additional problem that in science you often put "natural" before the word environment. And that creates a further set of problems.

**PONTO.URBE** - We would like to tackle this "natural" problem that is put in the sense of environment. Writing about building, dwelling and living you draw a parallel between trees and buildings, distinguished by the proportions of humans and non-human in its development. Although, scientific studies are progressively taking into account the role of long term human activity of the Amerindian population in the composition of forests, such as the Amazon Forest. Can we think about the generating process as natural and artificial at the same time? So, we're talking about recent developments in Archaeology and Anthropology that are rethinking the "natural" environment of the Amazon Rainforest, which has long been the stereotype of a "natural", "virgin" forest, against human activity, seen as a

stereotype of "culture". So, we were wondering about the relationship between the proportion of the human and non-human life processes in building these environments. Can they be put together, what are the differences between them?

**T. Ingold** - I don't think, in the end, that we can sustain this division between natural and the artificial, and it is probably not helpful to do so. But that also means, perhaps, substituting the word building for growing, because building always has this thing that you're putting something in place, whereas, growing gives the sense of a process going on under certain conditions. So, when a gardener says: "I'm growing these plants in my garden", it means that he is planting the seeds, putting in place certain conditions to favor the growth of those particular plants. But, still, there are other things that are involved in order for the plant to grow. He is not building it, in that sense.

So what we can say is that, in the Amazon Forest, the human activity has played a much greater part in the growth of that forest than previously thought, which I think is fairly well established. But then the next stage would be to say that the same argument that you could make about the growth of a forest, you could also make about the growth of those kinds of structures that we tend to call artificial, like houses, or roads, and things like that. Can we think of those things as also grown, in the sense that the structure emerges out of a whole set of practices, processes... and some of these practices and processes might be undertaken by humans and maybe, in building a house, for example, most of them? But, still, there are other things as well, that always come in, there are always animal inhabitants of the houses, of course with different degrees, and the weather, of course, the sun and all sorts of other things with which you have to contend. So, the idea that a house is first built and then people come to live in it is, to some extent, part of an architectural conceit. It doesn't really match what actually happens.

So, rather than asking: "Do we have a division between natural and artificial?", I prefer saying that we are looking at processes by which the structures that we find in the world have grown. And, what are the conditions for growth? What has been the role of local communities in creating these conditions? And then we can ask: "What has been the role of the birds, what has been the role of the weather and everything else that has combined to create something?"

**PONTO.URBE** - One your works that became a reference in our universities is "Key Debates in Anthropology", which you commented a bit earlier. Considering your present research issues in today's anthropological field, what are the key debates of our decade?

**T. Ingold** - It has been 15 years. The debates I think ran from 1988 until about 1994 or something like that. Then they stopped, and I can't remember exactly why, but, anyway, they stopped and we decided that we would put those debates together into a book. And then I moved up to Aberdeen, but the people in Manchester decided, about 3 or 4 years ago, to restart them, and there have been a series of such debates... One of the most difficult things in organizing such debates is finding a proposition that people will actually be divided about. It is easy to think of something really hard-hitting or polemical, where everybody would say: "of course we agree" or "of course we disagree". But to find one where people are actually evenly split is quite hard.

In all those debates, it always appeared that the real division was somewhere different from where we imagined it. I always remember the debate on whether human environments are culturally constructed, and we thought it was going to be a big debate on Biology and Culture, but actually it all ended up hinging on the meaning of the word "construction". That is very interesting.

I can't remember now the recent topics, because they were quite complicated, but there was one about whether ontology is just another word for culture, and there was one about what means... something about what relations means. It was a very complicated title, but what is it to be involved in social relations. And there is another debate coming up in November.

It's very hard for me to say what the key debates of our time or in the immediate future are going to be. And the reason for that is, that in Britain, I feel that I've gone in one direction and by and large anthropology has gone in another direction. I often wonder whether I am an anthropologist anymore, I think I'm forging a field and that it doesn't seem to be the field that other people who call themselves anthropologists are in. Then, I don't worry about it too much, because I just do what I do and I let other people decide whether I'm an anthropologist or not.

But I do feel that I would like to bring anthropology back to the center, where I think it belongs, in public debates about what it means to be human, about freedom, about responsibility, about ethics, where it isn't at the moment. Instead, the ground is being occupied by psychologists, historians and economists, and people that sometimes are producing very destructive messages. I worry that anthropology has allowed itself to fall below the horizon of public consciousness, and that we need much more ambition in what we do. But, in a way, the debates don't change. The fundamental questions are still what does it actually mean to be a human being in the world; what is language all about; how is it that we perceive the way we do; how can we remember things; why do we tell stories all the time? These are basic anthropological questions, and I don't think they've gone away at all.

I don't know what the key debates will be in the future. I'm hoping, actually, that this whole question of the relation between anthropology and ethnography will become an area of key debate, because I think it's crucial. I think that the collapse of anthropology into ethnography has been harmful. So, I hope it is something we'll be debating more. But I don't know otherwise where we're going to go.

**PONTO.URBE** - Perhaps you can debate with us in the future.

**T. Ingold** - Who knows?