Special Section Article

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Exploring taskscapes: an introduction

Abstract

In his 1993 essay 'The temporality of the landscape', Tim Ingold argued that landscape develops through processes of temporality, that is time as it emerges in the unfolding of life through action. This association between temporality and landscape was expressed by the term 'taskscape'. In our introduction to this section, we return to the concept of taskscape to assess its usefulness in light of a number of developments in the understanding of human–environment relations. These include the changing conceptualisation of 'landscape' and the emergence of new approaches for understanding relations across species. We explain the ways that the three authors in this section use taskscape to think through political tensions and to explore how landscapes are achieved through inter-relating actions of humans and other beings. We conclude by emphasising the heuristic value of taskscape as a means of thinking through the implications of the Anthropocene. Both taskscape and Anthropocene are concepts that draw together human history and the shaping of the world and, as such, the taskscape offers a novel means to explore and understand the dynamics of Anthropocene environmental relations.

Key words taskscape, temporality, Anthropocene, environmental anthropology, landscape

The landscape: temporality, tasks and resonances

In his 1993 essay 'The temporality of the landscape',[1] Tim Ingold argued that landscape develops through processes of temporality, that is time as it emerges in the unfolding of life through action. This association between temporality and landscape was expressed by the term 'taskscape'. Ingold's aim in introducing this term was to bring landscape to life rather than reducing it to the pictorial stasis of the 'world at rest' (2017: 1). In doing this, he helped move landscape studies in the 1990s beyond visual, representational and symbolic approaches (see Meulemans in this section). Defined as 'the pattern of dwelling activities' (Ingold 1993: 153), the taskscape is the array of practices that human and non-human beings carry out in the temporal process of inhabiting their environment. The landscape develops concurrently with the taskscape, emerging both socially and ecologically through the ongoing activities that shape the land. The taskscape thus overcomes the opposition between the sociocultural dimension of landscape and a naturalistic view. The taskscape aimed to emphasise that landscape is not visual scenery to be contemplated or a material backdrop to social life, but is a temporal phenomenon entangled with the dwelling of its inhabitants.

[1] Revised and reproduced in the 2000 collection *The perception of the environment: essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill*.

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In this section, we return to the concept of the taskscape to reconsider its value for anthropologists in the light of various developments in environmental anthropology. We consider the original intentions behind the term before examining how the conceptualisation of landscape has changed, particularly through the historical and etymological research of Olwig (1996). We also discuss how the development of more-than-human approaches might be incorporated into taskscapes and how in turn the concept's value might be re-examined through the development of new ontological claims about the world, such as Ingold's own development of 'meshwork' and the proposed designation of the Anthropocene. In this introduction, we also describe the ways the three papers in this section use the idea of taskscape to discuss key issues in current debates, including invasion biology (Helmreich 2005), multispecies anthropology (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010) and nature conservation (Brockington et al. 2008).

In understanding the development of the taskscape perspective, the temporal dimension, temporality, is key. Drawing on Alfred Gell's reflections on time (1992), Ingold explains that temporality is immanent in the passage of events rather than transcendent of them: it is neither chronological time, in which time and events are independent of one another, nor history, as a series of punctuated events that occurred in a chronological interval. Temporality is rather about the 'ongoingness' of time: it is a process that emerges alongside the activities of dwelling; it is the rhythmical resonance that lies between the multiple and various tasks of which the taskscape is constituted, and the means by which the landscape comes to life. These tasks should not be thought of as discrete and separate but as part and parcel of the ongoing current of life: they constitute and 'carry forward social life'. In Ingold's terms, the taskscape emerges through dwelling, through people's being in the world and their consequent engagement with their surroundings.

The analogy that he uses to explain the taskscape and its relation to temporality is to consider the ways in which time is understood in relation to music. When musicians conduct the task of playing music they need to keep in time and the music that emerges also has a time. But what is meant by time in this sense and how does it arise? Time in music emerges from the activities of the musicians rather than being independent of their playing. Time thus only exists in this sense through the activity of playing music: it emerges through the rhythm performed by musicians and in their attuning to each other. Temporality is to taskscape what rhythm is to the activities of musicians playing music. In this sense temporality is inherently social because it emerges within and along relationships, and at the same time it defines relationships; it involves attending to others and their activities and, it is hoped, resonating with them.

In 'The temporality of the landscape', Ingold reflects on resonance by pursuing the comparison with music. He writes:

> In orchestral music, the achievement of resonance – or what Schutz (1951: 78) called a 'mutual tuning-in relationship' – is an absolute precondition for successful performance. But the same is true, more generally, of social life (Wikan 1992, Richards 1996). Indeed it could be argued that in the resonance of movement and feeling stemming from people's mutually attentive engagement, in shared contexts of practical activity, lies the very foundation of sociality. (Ingold 2000: 196)

Here, it is important to understand that this sociality exceeds human relationships and involves a deeper understanding of it as an intrinsically more-than-human phenomenon. As Ingold explains, this sociality certainly encompasses environmental

relationships at large, including human responses to non-living phenomena, such as tides, seasons, meteorological events and astronomic cycles (Ingold 2000: 199–200; see also Krause 2013; Whitehouse 2017).

This point has recently been stressed by Ingold (2017: 1–3) when he describes the development of the essay and the concept of taskscape. He first coined the term in a lecture given to undergraduate students in 1990 in which he attempted to convey the things that make up the social and are thus the focus of anthropological enquiry. Interestingly, he began by contrasting the taskscape and the landscape. He illustrated the social using the painting *The battle between carnival and Lent* by Pieter Breugel the Elder, in which a myriad of human activities are depicted in a medieval town square. Ingold contrasted this vivacious scene with the typical depiction of the world in landscape paintings as 'a world at rest'. The taskscape, then, was initially a world in which humans did things together in social life while landscape was merely the representation of a material backdrop to life. Within this view, sociality looked very much like a human exceptionalist phenomenon, played against a material world, or landscape, that humans were understood to interact with. By 1993, when Ingold published 'The temporality of the landscape', his ideas about taskscape had moved on, and the manifest aim of the essay was to overcome the opposition between society and nature rather than perpetuate it.

The shift in Ingold's thinking about taskscape can be described through his use of a different Breugel painting, *The harvesters*. Ingold began to realise that the world of *The harvesters* – a far more bucolic and naturalistic scene than *The battle between carnival and Lent* – was just as much of a taskscape. The theoretical quest he was addressing at the time emerges in the following passage:

> If only they could [be merged] this could solve my problem of how to understand the inhabited world of the organism-person in a way that would override or even dissolve the barrier between nature and society. The solution I eventually found was that they could indeed be merged, but only by restoring taskscape to the textures of the land, and landscape to the current of time. (2017: 5)

The result of this merging was that the taskscape was not social life set against the material world but the life of the world itself. Key to developing this solution was the 'dwelling perspective' (see Gruppuso in this section) that Ingold elaborated from different sources such as Martin Heidegger's phenomenology (1971), von Uexküll's biosemiotics (1957) and Gibson's ecological approach (1979; see Jones 2009). According to this perspective, dwelling is the basic condition of existence; by performing their daily activities and tasks, living beings create and transform the environments they inhabit and are in turn created and transformed themselves: consequently the environment is built, the landscape *shaped* (Ingold 2017). By taking such a perspective, the taskscape not only overcame the opposition between nature and society, but also the distinction between built and 'unbuilt' landscape.

Land shaped: critiques to the taskscape

Much has changed in our understanding of landscape since 1993, particularly through the work of Kenneth Olwig. Studying the medieval polities of north European landscape, particularly in Denmark and northern Germany, Olwig realised the deep

connections between land and the polity that shaped it (1993, 1996, 2002, 2008). This relation was emphasised in the etymology of the term landscape that he retraced from the old German *Landshaft*:

> The suffix *shaft* and the English *ship* are cognate, meaning essentially 'creation, creature, constitution, condition' (O.E.D. 1971: -ship). *Schaft* is related to the verb *schaffen*, to create or shape, so *ship* and *shape* are also etymologically linked (O.E.D. 1971: *Shape*). The citizens in good standing of a New England town shape the body politic of the *township* as constituted under a body of law. A township is both a body of citizens, the representatives who make decisions on behalf of those citizens (as in 'the township voted to raise taxes'), and the domain shaped by those citizens. (Olwig 1996: 633)

Such an etymological awareness resituated the meaning of landscape beyond the 'scopic' and visual regime; from this perspective landscape appears to be the outcome, and the reflection, of social, political and economic activities. Accordingly, as Ingold himself recognised drawing on Olwig's works, 'landscape is literally a land shaped' (Ingold 2012: 198). In this sense, the original meaning of landscape, as *Landschaft*, connotes something similar to taskscape, 'created as place and polity by people through their practices of dwelling – their 'doing' of landscape' (Olwig 2008: 82). For this reason, Ingold (2017) has recently argued that the taskscape is no longer needed because landscape actually does what taskscape was originally meant to do. The landscape as the 'world at rest' had been an imposter all along.

While the concept of taskscape has been widely recognised as a breakthrough in archaeology (Thomas 2017) and still provokes passionate discussions (see Hicks 2016), its value in anthropology has been less conspicuous. Anthropological reference works on landscape (e.g. Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995; Stewart and Strathern 2003; Filippucci 2016) have completely ignored this concept, focusing instead on political, symbolic and representational aspects. Moreover, when used in anthropological reflections, the taskscape often seems understood as a phenomenon related to human labour (e.g. Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017), or human activities (e.g. Linné and Sellerberg 2018), in contrast with nature (e.g. Cherrington et al. 2018), thus appearing as one dimension of the landscape, and not as constitutive to it. In the field of geography and environmental humanities, the concept has fruitfully been explored by Paul Cloke and Owain Jones in relation to dwelling (2001; see also Jones 2009), and from a perspective that rightly includes other-than-human subjects such as trees (Jones and Cloke 2002; see also Jones 2013). The same authors also raised interesting critiques of taskscape's romantic overtones, wondering whether Ingold's approach would work in conflictual and industrial contexts, and thus questioning the presumed oneness of the taskscape (Cloke and Jones 2001). Likewise, Doreen Massey (2006) reflected on the multiple temporalities implicated in the taskscape, noticing that Ingold does not really address how these different temporalities come together, and how they respond to each other. Drawing on Bender's reflections (1998), Cloke and Jones (2001) also observed that in emphasising activities and practices the taskscape overlooks the role of representations, which can instead characterise a particular landscape from the historical and imaginary perspective, thus feeding different and sometimes contrasting political narratives.

Indeed, the main critique raised against the taskscape and the associated concept of dwelling is precisely the lack of a clear political reflection concerning the tensions

and conflicts that the intertwining of different tasks and temporalities often entail. This is certainly true of much of Ingold's work, and he has rarely addressed political and contested issues in a direct way (though see Ingold 2005). Interestingly, however, the essays in this collection explore highly political contestations, describing the taskscape as an entanglement of different activities performed by humans and non-humans, in a process of resonance that is not always peaceful and harmonious. In this sense, even though other perspectives on the landscape arguably convey a deeper political dimension (e.g. Olwig; Bender), this collection demonstrates that Ingold's taskscape provides a powerful heuristic tool to understand the world and its own doing, contestations and politics included.

Taskscapes of the current age: alien species, agriculture and conservation areas

The papers in this special section develop distinctive and fresh approaches to Ingold's taskscape that widen its original significance and re-evaluate its potential for understanding environmental relations, their temporalities and the ways in which the world that is perceived emerges through the actions of many beings as a more-than-human process. The authors elaborate on different perspectives that challenge the concept of taskscape by pushing it towards unexpected and original directions. In doing so, their ethnographies demonstrate the vitality and plasticity of this concept to understand, navigate and explain the complexity of human–environment relations in the current age.

Caetano Sordi's ethnography explores contestations concerning the proliferation of alien species such as European wild boars (*Sus scrofa*) in the Pampa landscape of the Brazil–Uruguay border. Specifically, Sordi analyses emic notions of labour (*trabajo*) to demonstrate local understandings of wild boars as 'bandits' that share the same 'work method' as cattle thieves. To do so, he attends to the temporality of the landscape and to the tasks that human and non-human inhabitants perform during their lives within it. This application of taskscape challenges conventional approaches to biological invasions, which usually emphasise territorial frameworks and dualistic narratives, e.g. native versus alien, in relation to political, cultural and national identities. Sordi complicates this by analysing the wider socio-environmental history of the region and its agonistic pattern of human–animal relations, demonstrating that the contestations concerning the propagation of European wild boars in the area need to be framed and understood within the temporal formation of that particular landscape. In this context, taskscape is used to explore and understand environmental contestations, despite critiques that have highlighted its apparent emphasis on harmony, flow and peacefulness (Meulemans in this section). In this example the harmful agency of wild boars emerges through the 'tasks' they carry out in a highly political landscape, embedded within the more-than-human network of ranching culture, economy and ecology.

The same tension in expanding the taskscape to encompass and understand multispecies relations is developed by Germain Meulemans, who explores the problematic relations between farmers and water voles in the agrarian landscape of the Jura uplands in France. Meulemans emphasises the analytical value of the taskscape to explore conflicts, dissonances, breaks and contradictions within the landscape. By discussing the recent socio-environmental history of the Jura uplands, he links the temporality of the

landscape, and the more-than-human sociality that shapes it, with wider issues concerning post-war land reforms and global agricultural markets. In doing so, the politics of the taskscape are exposed, demonstrating the co-constitution of the Jura landscape as a mingling of human and non-human tasks. He aptly demonstrates that the proliferation of voles in the Jura uplands results from the transformation of that landscape, historically characterised by a variety of ecosystems such as meadows, woodlands and edges, into a specialised and intensive monoculture sustained by land rationalisation, fertilisers and pesticides. Accordingly, Meulemans reflects on what Tsing calls 'the plantation system' (Tsing 2012: 148), and addresses the ethical and aesthetic values embedded within the modernist ideal of a landscape that rejects its more-than-human dimension, and the agency of its other-than-human inhabitants. In the conclusion, the author emphasises that within this context vole outbreaks remind us that landscape is never made up of individual species but is a constellation of human and non-human tasks in continual correspondence.

This web of resonance constitutes what Ingold calls the temporality of the landscape, which Paolo Gruppuso explores through the activities of environmental interpreters, nature guides working in Circeo National Park, a conservation area in Agro Pontino, Italy. By describing the movements, tasks and activities of environmental interpreters and visitors in the National Park, he demonstrates that, far from being an object of scrutiny or contemplation, nature emerges in guided visits as a constellation of activities resulting from a particular way of dwelling and performing the environment. This 'mode of dwelling' (Macnaghten and Urry 2001: 6) emerges within a specific temporality, the rhythm of guided visits, that corresponds with the more-than-human rhythms of seasons, plant and animal life, and that constitutes a particular 'taskscape of conservation'. Here a performative approach expands Ingold's taskscape and reframes it within a wider discourse on knowledge, perception and cognition (see Szerszynski et al. 2003). The tasks performed by environmental interpreters and the activities proposed during guided visits shape the particular environment of conservation areas through a particular 'mode of action' that makes nature visible to visitors, thus suggesting a specific 'mode of perception'. For example, Gruppuso describes how particular ways of approaching and moving within the boundaries of the National Park spatialise the perception of native and introduced plant species, thus essentialising their difference and framing it within a particular ethics. Within this theoretical configuration, the taskscape exposes the environmental ethics of nature conservation, its performative dimension and cognitive outcomes.

Landscape, environment and the Anthropocene: the taskscape still tasks

Taskscape draws our attention to the doings of the world and the ways in which these myriad activities shape the land. The taskscapes discussed in these essays are entanglements that are sometimes peaceful, sometimes fractious. They are built up through innumerable life-lines traced by human and non-human beings, in the practice of dwelling in a particular environment and the consequent shaping of the land. These life-lines, with their own specific and intertwined temporalities, are the weaving of the world and its breath. As Ingold puts it,

> [the land is] an immense tangle of interlaced trails – an all-encompassing rhizome – which is continually ravelling here, and unravelling there, as the beings of which it is composed grow, or 'issue forth', along the lines of their relationships. … Thus there is no opposition here between history and land. Both carry the same intrinsic temporality. Woven like a tapestry from the lives of its inhabitants, the land is not so much a stage for the enactment of history, or a surface on which it is inscribed, as *history congealed*. … the lives of persons and the histories of their relationships can be traced in the textures of the land. (Ingold 2000: 149–50; emphasis in original)

This particular excerpt, as much as our perspective on the taskscape, resonates with a more recent notion conceptualised by Ingold: meshwork (Ingold 2007, 2011). Meshwork is the ontological claim that the inhabited environment, indeed life more generally, is not made from initially distinct objects that then become interrelated. Rather, the environment *is* those relations; it is a generative field, a tapestry in the process of being continuously woven. In this sense, and from a broader scale, taskscape, landscape and environment are terms that subtend a similar meaning: the Earth is a sphere of life activity woven in the different tasks that its human and non-human inhabitants carry out in their historical lives. Read in this way, we can understand temporality as the weaving of the meshwork; a thread that involves different and peculiar temporalities: lines of growth, evolution, decay and regeneration. It is in the weaving of this thread that politics, ethics and conflicts emerge and flourish, as temporal formations. This theoretical shift, from shaping to weaving, enables the recovery of the 'substantive nature' of the taskscape, and takes it 'to task' (Ingold 2017). In this sense, the taskscape can be used to explore and understand conflicts within a frame that looks at practices and activities without denying the power of discourses, narratives and representations (cf. Whitehouse 2015, 2017). The essays herein demonstrate that practices, activities and tasks shape the land along with ethical and political concerns; they involve different temporalities but they share the same geomorphological trajectory that inscribes the world. Thus, the world is storied with the lives of its inhabitants.

Despite critiques of romantic overtones and oneness (Massey 2006: 16; Cloke and Jones 2001: 661), the taskscape can also be employed to articulate original reflections on landscapes that are fragmented, disrupted or abandoned by human activities. The temporalities of human activities, in fact, cannot be severed from the web of life and the unfolding trajectory of other-than-human temporalities. The landscape cannot be unshaped nor the meshwork unravelled. This corresponds with the proposal of the Anthropocene: activities of human communities are entangled with the earth, and constitute the geological processes of our planet, independent from their current presence or absence in the landscape. Here, the notion of perdurance is key (Ingold 2013). Unlike the principle of permanence, Ingold argues, perdurance implies transformation in the continuity of process (2013: 104): the world is the plastic memory of past events that are continually unfolding, and that shape the future. Far from being abstract speculation, this aspect has to do with a principle that no biological or physical system can escape, namely the second law of thermodynamics: the energy involved in shaping the land will never be completely transformed in the shapes of the land; it will rather perdure in other forms, such as, for example, waste and pollution. These must be considered as part of the taskscape; that which perdures of previous activities, and that is part and parcel of their temporalities.

This particular approach, we find, is particularly fruitful to the claims of the Anthropocene, in which the world can be conceived as emerging from dissonant

relations between humans and non-humans. Like the Anthropocene, temporality draws together both geological and historical time, while both concepts attempt to explain the interconnectedness of the world and the lives of its inhabitants. Conventional stratigraphic models understand humankind as a layer lying on top of the Earth's surface, and present the Anthropocene as a period in which 'nature and culture are in antagonistic relationships' (Barbera 2019: 28; my translation). Our approach to the taskscape suggests a different perspective: humans are not only shapers of the land's surface; they are rather entangled in it, and their life constitutes an ecological and geological whole with the Earth and its other-than-human inhabitants. It is in the weaving of individual and social life that the Earth emerges both as a geological formation and as a phenomenological experience. In this sense, beyond any anthropocentric and stratigraphic characterisation we can understand the Anthropocene as the taskscape of our age. Moreover, by focusing on activities and tasks, the taskscape also addresses the diversity of human experience, thus emphasising the different political, ecological and cultural weight of human actions in relation to the current environmental crisis. In doing so, the taskscape can overcome critiques raised towards the Anthropocene as a concept based on the too generic category of *Anthropos* (Moore 2017; Malm and Hornborg 2014).

Even though none of the essays presented in this collection deal explicitly with the Anthropocene, they all describe environments that are exemplary of the 'age of man', such as postcolonial landscapes, agricultural lands and conservation areas. They emphasise that the taskscape, as an approach that overcomes the distinction between natural and built, form and process, human and non-human, provides a productive ontological ground to understand and describe the complex, ambiguous and contradictory environmental relations that characterise our common dwelling. This is significant, as many scholars are arguing that the current socio-environmental crisis is indeed a crisis of meaning and perception (e.g. Capra and Luisi 2014; Weber 2019). This crisis results from an outdated worldview based on the assumption that history and geology, humankind and nature are different ontological realms with distinct and irreconcilable temporalities. Within this context the taskscape presents an opportunity to rediscover the deep entanglement of geological and historical temporalities, thus affirming their substantial and ontological unity.

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Introduction à l'exploration des *taskscapes*

Dans son essai de 1993 intitulé 'The temporality of the landscape' (« La temporalité du paysage »), Tim Ingold soutient que le paysage évolue selon des processus de temporalité, c'est-à-dire le temps tel qu'il se manifeste à travers des actions dans le déroulement de la vie. L'association de la temporalité et du paysage est exprimée par le terme *taskscape*. Dans l'introduction de ce dossier, nous revenons sur le concept de *taskscape* afin d'évaluer son utilité à la lumière de nombreuses avancées dans la compréhension des relations entre l'homme et l'environnement, notamment l'évolution de la conceptualisation du « paysage » et l'émergence de nouvelles approches pour comprendre les relations inter-espèces. Je présente la façon dont les trois articles dans ce dossier emploient le concept de *taskscape* pour analyser les tensions politiques et examiner de quelle manière les paysages se réalisent à travers des actions associant des êtres humains et d'autres êtres vivants. En conclusion, je mets l'accent sur la valeur heuristique du concept de *taskscape* en tant que ressource pour réfléchir aux conséquences de l'anthropocène. Les concepts de *taskscape* et d'anthropocène font le lien entre l'histoire humaine et la formation du monde; le *taskscape* propose ainsi un nouveau moyen d'étudier et de comprendre la dynamique des relations environnementales de l'anthropocène.

Mots clés taskscape, temporalité, Anthropocène, anthropologie environnmentale, paysage