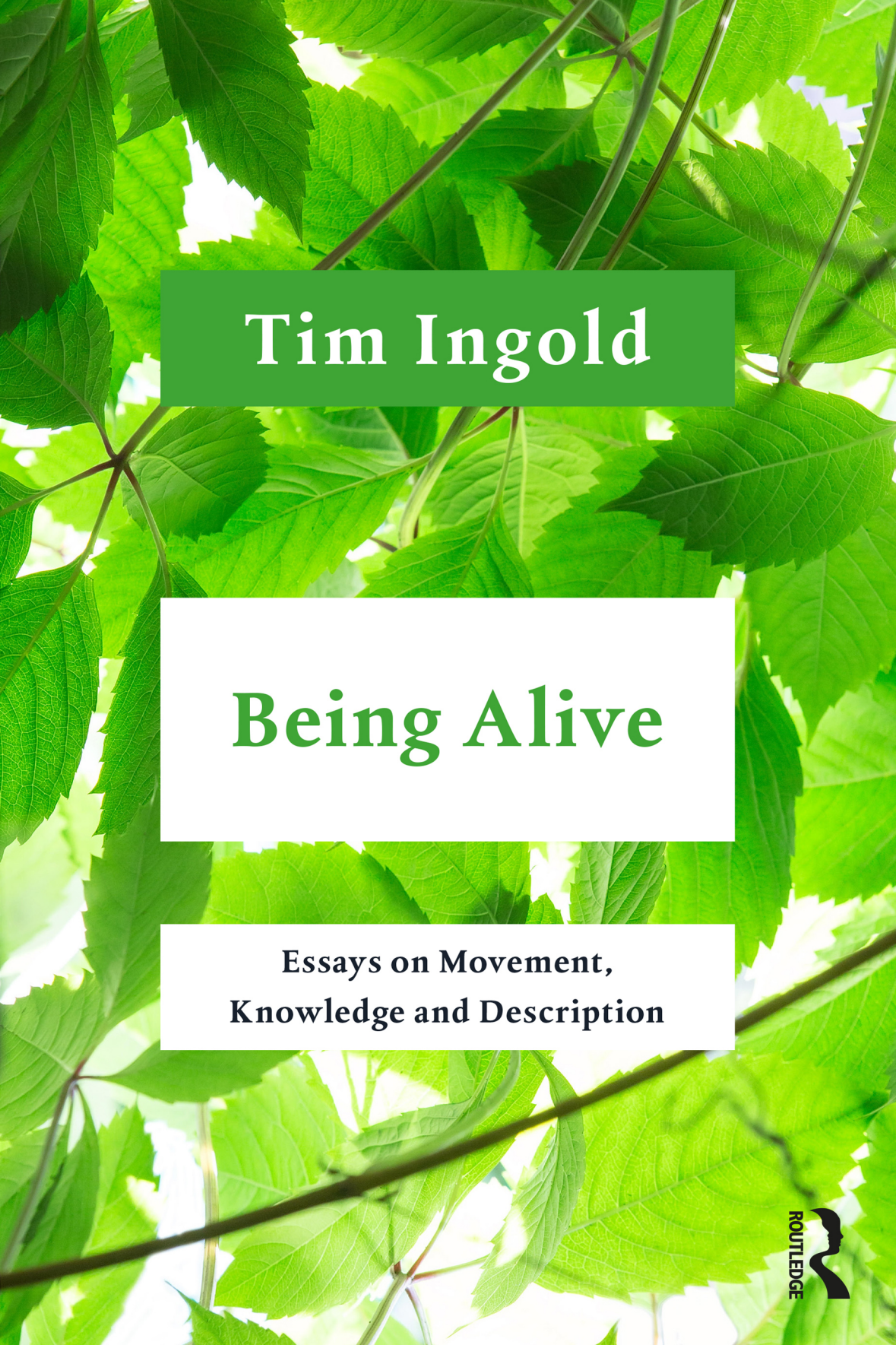
Tim Ingold
Being Alive
Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description
ROUTLEDGE

Being Alive

Anthropology is a disciplined inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life. Generations of theorists, however, have expunged life from their accounts, treating it as the mere output of patterns, codes, structures or systems variously defined as genetic or cultural, natural or social. Building on his classic work *The Perception of the Environment*, Tim Ingold sets out to restore life to where it should belong, at the heart of anthropological concern.

Being Alive ranges over such themes as the vitality of materials; what it means to make things; the perception and formation of the ground; the mingling of earth and sky in the weather-world; the experiences of light, sound and feeling; the role of storytelling in the integration of knowledge; and the potential of drawing to unite observation and description.

Our humanity, Ingold argues, does not come ready-made but is continually fashioned in our movements along ways of life. Starting from the idea of life as a process of wayfaring, Ingold presents a radically new understanding of movement, knowledge and description as dimensions not just of being in the world, but of being alive to what is going on there.

This edition includes a new preface by the author.

Tim Ingold is Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. He is the author of many books, including *Lines*, *Making*, *Imagining for Real* and *The Perception of the Environment*.

‘For three decades, Tim Ingold has been one of the most consistently exploratory and provocative voices in contemporary scholarship. This book leads us, in prose that is exactingly lucid and charged with poetic eloquence, on a journey through, amongst other things, Chinese calligraphy, line drawing, carpentry, kite flying, Australian Aboriginal painting, native Alaskan storytelling, web-spinning arachnids, the art of walking and, not least, the history of anthropology, none of which will ever look quite the same again! The work is at once a meditation on questions central to anthropology, art practice, human ecology and philosophy, a passionate rebuttal of reductionisms of all kinds, a celebration of creativity understood in the broadest possible sense and a humane and generous manual for living in a world of becoming.’

Stuart McLean, *University of Minnesota, USA*

‘Simultaneously intimate and all-encompassing, Tim Ingold’s second landmark collection of essays explains how it feels to craft an existence between earth and sky, among plants and animals, across childhood and old age. A master of the form, Ingold shows how aliveness is the essential resource for an affirmative philosophy of life.’

Hayden Lorimer, *University of Glasgow, UK*

‘In these iconoclastic essays, Ingold breaks the dichotomies of likeness and difference to show that anthropology’s subject, and with it that of the human sciences more generally, is not constituted by polarities like that of space contra place, but by a movement along paths that compose a being that is as alive to the sentient world as this world is to its human inhabitants.’

Kenneth Olwig, *Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences*

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‘It’s my life’
Zack Ingold (aged 3)
to whom, with affection,
this book is dedicated.

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Preface to the new edition

This book begins with a stone. It is not only that I have chosen a stone to open the first chapter of the first part. I have also drawn the title of the book, *Being Alive*, from a question about stones. For me, the question came up as long ago as 1995, when I was in the midst of writing an essay, 'A circumpolar night's dream', centred on a reappraisal of the studies of the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell among the Ojibwa people of Berens River, in north-central Canada. Hallowell had been puzzled by the fact that in the Ojibwa language, at least as formalised by linguists, the word for 'stone' belongs to a class normally applied to animate rather than inanimate entities. In a celebrated exchange with Chief William Berens, Hallowell had asked whether this means that all the stones we see around us are alive, to which Berens had responded, after much thought, 'No! But some are' (Hallowell 1960: 24). As with everything in the Ojibwa cosmos, it all depends. Indeed, Berens might have come up with the same answer, had the question been about trees, bears, or even humans. This is because life, in Ojibwa ontology, is not an interior property that some kinds of things possess and other kinds don't. It is rather a power, diffused throughout the cosmos, that can take hold of things and beings in such a way that in their actions, in their movements, even in their sounds (which may be interpreted as speech), they become vividly present to us, in experience. In such moments, things, including stones, come to life.

Over the next four years I would often return to 'A circumpolar night's dream', rewriting it every time, until it eventually appeared in print as a chapter in my collection of essays, *The Perception of the Environment* (Ingold 2000: 89-110). The lesson I had drawn from working on it is that beings and things of every description have their own idiosyncratic manners of presence, or *ways of being alive*, which reveal them for what or who they are. You know a person from their voice, a bear from its gait, a tree from the way its boughs sway or its leaves rustle in the breeze, a stone from its rolling in the river's waters or its settlement in the landscape. But what does this lesson teach us about the meaning of life? In *The Perception of the Environment*, I had raised this question of being alive, but it remained far

from resolved. At that time, theorists in the social sciences and humanities were obsessed with the problem of agency, but had virtually nothing to say about life. Had they been in Hallowell's shoes, they would probably have asked not 'are all stones alive?' but 'do stones have agency?' That humans possess agency was, for them, without question, but many were excited by the possibility of extending the power of agency to diverse 'nonhumans', including everything under the sun from baboons to speedbumps (Latour 1999: 186-90; 2005). For my part, I felt that this reduction of life to agency was a serious mistake, and in many of the essays that have found their way into this book, I was determined to show why.

I began by questioning the unquestionable. Do even humans have agency? Do we possess the power to make things happen? Many would equate this power with the capacity to form intentions, and to act upon them. But if that is where agency lies, then how can it possibly be attributed to stones, which lack even the rudiments of a nervous system? Others would insist that agency should be distinguished from intentionality. Place an object in an environment, they would say, and its presence has an effect. Things would be different if it wasn't there. And if it has an effect, intended or not, this can only be the result of its agency. Some would even roll cause and effect into one and speak of 'agentive effects'! Yet to anyone not completely bamboozled by agency-speak, the circularity of conflating agency and effectivity is plain to see. It reminds me of earlier times, when theorists wanted everything to have a function, until critics pointed out, quite rightly, that to say a thing functions to bring about the effects of its presence is no more than a fancy way of saying it exists. It is just the same with agency. Dressed up in the language of agency was the realisation, heralded as a great discovery by some western philosophers and their anthropological confrères but long since obvious to everyone else, that the inhabited world abounds with forms of existence other than the human, and that these forms can enter into relations with one another, and hold meanings for each other, even if there are no humans around to bear witness to the fact.

For me then, the question was: what does it take for these forms to be alive? To find the answer, we have to restore them to the currents of their formation, to enter into the processes wherein they come into existence as the forms they are. It is a question, in short, not of ontology but of ontogenesis, not of the essence of being but of its generation. For it is as true of humans as of all the other inhabitants of our one world that life is as much undergone as done. We are constitutionally in the midst. It follows that whatever power we may have to make things happen arises from within the movement of our own formation. This is to say that the things we do in life are in the nature of tasks: it *befalls* to us to do them. Our actions therefore belong to us only insofar as we belong to others, and to a world. The idea that humans (whether or not uniquely in the animal kingdom) are fully in command of an agency which they can wield as they will, is

a myth. Equally mythical is the idea that their actions are physically or culturally predetermined. They act, rather, from within the becoming of a world which they shape even as it shapes them. Of course, in thinking these thoughts I was not alone. Looking back, it is evident that they were part of a wider trend across diverse fields of humane scholarship towards philosophies of becoming, particularly inspired by the process ontology of Alfred North Whitehead and the vitalism of Henri Bergson.

I was already reading the works of Bergson and Whitehead in the early 1980s, when they were deeply unfashionable, and they had a profound influence on my thinking. Their contemporary revival, however, owes much to the influence of philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze (1988) for Bergson, and Isabelle Stengers (2014) for Whitehead. With this, the concept of agency is once more on the back foot, having taken second place – especially in the writings of Deleuze – to the virtually untranslatable idea of *agencement*. Rather than attempting a translation, I am inclined to follow artist and cultural theorist Erin Manning (2016: 123), for whom *agencement* 'speaks to the interstitial arena of experience of the interval'. By this she refers precisely to the way the current of lived experience carries on in the midst of things, finding a direction as it goes, much as the waters of a river course between its banks. As Manning observes, just because one is not the master of one's own acts doesn't mean that someone or something else is, or that agency is more widely distributed around a whole network of inter-agents. It means, rather, that there must be something wrong with an account that treats whatever happens as the *effect* of an agentive *cause*. Even those who persist with the concept of agency are forced to admit, with science studies scholar Karen Barad (2003: 826-7), that it denotes 'an enactment, not something that someone or something has'. But if agency exists only in enactment, it is difficult to see why we need the concept at all. Why not stick with simple verbs like 'act', 'do' and 'grow', or even 'live'?

Much of the problem, indeed, lies in the overreliance, in the languages of theory, on nouns rather than verbs. With nouns for subjects and objects, the verbs are simply inserted as connectors between the two. To start with the verb, however, is to inhabit the interval, wherein subjects and objects are not already given but encompassed in the movement of their formation. Here, as in *agencement*, what comes first is the going on. Things are what they do. The wind, for example, is not a thing that blows, it *is* its blowing. Trees *are* the flexing of the boughs and the rustling of their leaves. The sun *is* its shining, and its transit across the sky. Fire *is* its burning. The river *is* its running. And the stone – to return to the example from which I began – *is* its stoning. To observe a stone does not mean treating it as an object. Objectification, indeed, is the very opposite of observation. For what the former casts aside, the latter brings to attention. Strictly speaking, to observe is to *follow*, not passively through obedience to command, but actively, through an affective coupling of the movement of one's perception with the

movement of that to which it attends. This is what it means to watch, to listen and to feel. And it is in watching, listening and feeling that the stone comes to life. In your observant eyes, it is no longer cast in the embodied form of an object in a material world. It is rather a moment in the elemental unfolding of a world of materials.

The essays making up this book were composed on the cusp of this turn from objects to materials, and from studies of material culture to what has since become known as the 'new materialism'. In one of its founding texts political theorist Jane Bennett (2010: viii) sought 'to encourage more intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things'. That had been my aim also, though Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* was published too late for me to draw on it for these essays. Nor am I entirely convinced by it. Like other new materialists, Bennett latches onto the Deleuzian idea of *agencement*, but follows the precedent set by philosopher Brian Massumi in translating the word as 'assemblage'. Assemblages, says Bennett, are 'ad hoc groupings of diverse elements' (2010: 23) – bits and pieces arranged like the uncut stones of a wall into makeshift structures. While together, they may fulfil a certain function, each stone nevertheless retains its own particularity, and may just as well be rearranged with other stones in different combinations, and to different effect. Yet as Bergson had always insisted, there is no life in the combination and recombination of discrete elements. They come to life rather, in their gathering, in the ways they join with one another, go along together, and affect one another in the process. What flows through these gatherings, according to design theorist Lars Spuybroek, is *feeling*. 'All relations', Spuybroek asserts, 'are felt relations' (2011: 152). He calls them relations of sympathy, 'what things feel as they shape each other' (2011: 9). This is the other side of *agencement*, which is lost in its translation as 'assemblage'.

Spuybroek's work, like Bennett's, was published just too late for *Being Alive*. In these essays I was still trying to figure out why the idea of the 'actor-network', vigorously promoted through the writings of philosopher Bruno Latour (2005), made no sense to me. Eventually I discovered that it was all about the relation between points and lines. Latour had distributed agency around the points of the network, with connecting lines standing for their interaction. But with the painter Paul Klee (1961: 105), I found that to bring agents back to life I needed to set the points in motion, to turn nouns into verbs, whereupon each point itself became a line. These lines are not connectors. They don't go from point to point. Rather, they weave their ways through the interstices, tangling with other lines as they go. It was this that eventually led me to propose the idea of the *meshwork*, perhaps the key concept of this book. The idea has certainly caught on, even as 'entanglement' has become the metaphor *du jour* (Hodder 2012). Yet, I wondered, if the living world is a mesh of entangled lines, if its coherence lies in the ways they bind with one another, then what are we

to make of the atmosphere? There is no life without breath, without circulations of air. The concept of atmosphere has indeed become a topic of renewed attention in recent years (Bille and Simonsen 2019). But it would take me another book to solve the relation between atmosphere and meshwork. In *The Life of Lines* (Ingold 2015), I would go on to compare it to that between breathing in and out.

What, then, has all this to do with anthropology? The Epilogue to *Being Alive*, revised from a lecture presented in 2007, was my first attempt to show how an anthropology premised on the practice of participant observation must also mean joining with the people and things that capture one's attention, in an open-ended, dialogical process of mutual formation. It was in this essay that I first adumbrated the concept of *correspondence*, to refer to the ways in which lives go along together and answer to one another. In the correspondences of anthropological research, I suggest, observations answer to the experience of habitation. Though only mentioned in passing in the closing pages of the book, the concept of correspondence has gone on to take centre stage in my thinking (Ingold 2017). As a collective and open-ended exploration of what the possibilities and potentials of life might be, correspondence carries on over generations – much as a rope, twisted from fibres of limited length, winds on indefinitely. And as such, it is fundamentally *educational* – that is, if we take our lead from John Dewey (1966: 2) in regarding education as the means to the continuity of life. In later work, I have proposed that education, not ethnography, should be the fundamental purpose of anthropology (Ingold 2014). In ethnography we make studies *of* others, writing up their lives into published accounts. But anthropology, I believe, is a way of studying *with* others and learning *from* them. It draws their lives and experience into a collective conversation, critical to all of us on this planet, about how to live. Herein, finally, lies the question of *Being Alive*.

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Aberdeen
May 2021

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Preface and acknowledgements to the first edition

I am an anthropologist: not a social or cultural anthropologist; not a biological or archaeological anthropologist; just an anthropologist. And in this book I present a very personal view of what, for me, anthropology is. I do not pretend that it is in any way representative: to the contrary, anthropologists reading this book may feel that it strays rather far from their usual preoccupations, and that its centre of gravity lies closer to other fields such as art or architecture. It has indeed been part of my purpose to shift anthropology in this direction, a purpose founded on the conviction that the convention according to which anthropology is committed to observing and describing life as we find it, but not to changing it, whereas art and architecture are at liberty to propose forms never before encountered, without having first to observe and describe what is already there, is unsustainable. The truth is that the propositions of art and architecture, to the extent that they carry force, must be grounded in a profound understanding of the lived world, and conversely that anthropological accounts of the manifold ways in which life is lived would be of no avail if they were not brought to bear on speculative inquiries into what the possibilities for human life might be. Thus art, architecture and anthropology have in common that they observe, describe and propose. There is, perhaps, a discipline waiting to be defined and named where these three fields meet, and if some readers would prefer to regard this book as a kind of manifesto for that discipline, then I shall not object.

Nor would I object were anyone to consider my endeavour to be closer to philosophy than anthropology, save to say that I am no philosopher. I remain in awe of philosophers whose words I cannot even begin to understand, yet tantalised by the obscurity with which, so often, they seem to shroud their arguments. On reflection, however, I have been surprised by how much of the work that has influenced my thinking has come from philosophers rather than anthropologists. Indeed a quick count through the bibliography for this book reveals that of the works that can be definitively attributed to one particular discipline, almost as many are in philosophy as in anthropology. But if my kind of anthropology is actually philosophy,

then it is a philosophy that has been pitched out of its traditional academic turrets and forced to do its thinking both in and with the very world of which it writes. In such a philosophy, the bibliography of a book offers a poor guide to the real sources of intellectual inspiration. Why do we acknowledge only our textual sources but not the ground we walk, the ever-changing skies, mountains and rivers, rocks and trees, the houses we inhabit and the tools we use, not to mention the innumerable companions, both non-human animals and fellow humans, with which and with whom we share our lives? They are constantly inspiring us, challenging us, telling us things. If our aim is to read the world, as I believe it ought to be, then the purpose of written texts should be to enrich our reading so that we might be better advised by, and responsive to, what the world is telling us. I would like to think that this book serves such a purpose.

In many ways the book is a sequel to my earlier collection of essays, *The Perception of the Environment*, published in 2000. Whereas that book brought together a selection of my writings from the last decade of the twentieth century, the present volume does the same for the first decade of the twenty-first. In *Perception*, I put forward a conception of the human being as a singular nexus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships. This process of growth, I suggested, is tantamount to a movement along a way of life. My work since then has been largely dedicated to following through the implications of this suggestion. In doing so, I have found myself returning again and again to the same themes: the idea of life as lived along lines, or wayfaring; the primacy of movement; the nature and constitution of the ground; the divergent perspectives of the earth as ground of habitation and as distant planet; the intercourse of earth and sky, wind and weather; the fluidity and friction of materials; the experiences of light, sound and feeling; what it means to make things; drawing and writing; and storytelling. One of the key concepts that I introduce in this book is that of the meshwork, understood as a texture of interwoven threads. But the book itself exemplifies the concept, in that it, too, is woven from the thematic threads that run through it. Each of the chapters is a particular knot. By following the threads they can, in principle, be read in any order. For the sake of convenience, however, and in order to highlight what I think to be the principal regions of convergence, I have grouped the chapters into five parts.

These parts are: 'clearing the ground', 'the meshwork', 'earth and sky', 'a storied world' and 'drawing making writing'. They are flanked by an introductory prologue and a final epilogue: the former places the volume within the context of the development of my own thinking; the latter places it in the context of the history of the discipline of anthropology and its future prospects. When I first planned the book, I thought it would be divided into three parts, corresponding to the three keywords of the subtitle: movement, knowledge and description. I soon discovered, however, that this would

not work, since almost every chapter dealt with all three. The explanation for this lies in what, I suppose, can be taken as the major contention of the book, namely, that to move, to know, and to describe are not separate operations that follow one another in series, but rather parallel facets of the same process – that of life itself. It is by moving that we know, and it is by moving, too, that we describe. It is absurd to ask, for example, whether ordinary walking is a way of moving, knowing or describing. It is all three at once. This is so for one fundamental reason that is headlined in the title of this book. Philosophers have meditated at length on the condition of being in the world. Moving, knowing and describing, however, call for more than being *in*, or immersion. They call for observation. A being that moves, knows and describes must be observant. Being observant means being alive *to* the world. This book is a collection of studies in *being alive*.

British anthropologists like myself currently find themselves working in an academic environment that is profoundly hostile to the task of being alive. Crushed by an avalanche of mission statements, strategic plans, audit reports and review exercises, ideas born of the sweat and toil of an engagement that is nothing if not observant wilt and wither like plants starved of light, air and moisture. The prostitution of scholarship before the twin idols of innovation and competitiveness has reduced once fine traditions of learning to market brands, the pursuit of excellence to a grubby scramble for funding and prestige, and books such as this to outputs whose value is measured by rating and impact rather that by what they might have to contribute to human understanding. I am fortunate however to work in an institution – the University of Aberdeen – that has so far held out against the worst excesses of the business model of higher education. It is a place where ideas still count, and where intellectual life continues to flourish in a spirit of collegiality. In few other places, if any, would it have been possible to build up a programme of teaching and research in anthropology, as we have done in the past decade, starting from scratch, into the busy and thriving operation it is today. This is the decade, from 1999 to 2009, during which the essays comprising this volume were written.

The first three years were spent developing the programme, leading to the foundation of the Department of Anthropology in 2002. For the next three years I headed it, and for the next (2005-2008) I was largely on leave, thanks to the award of a Professorial Fellowship by the Economic and Social Research Council, for which I am profoundly grateful. Most of the work for this book was in fact completed during my tenure of this Fellowship. No sooner had it ended, however, than I was plunged into the maelstrom of my present position, as Head of the University's School of Social Science (which includes Anthropology, Sociology and Politics & International Relations). Once again, my reading, thinking and writing were muscled aside by the insistent and relentless demands of heavy-duty administration. This has been immensely frustrating. Every time I thought the skies might open to allow

me just a few days to write, the clouds closed in again and blocked out the light. At length, and in some desperation, I hurriedly bundled up a sheaf of papers, packed them in a suitcase, and took off with my family for three weeks in a cottage by the shores of Lake Pielinen in eastern Finland. That was in July 2010. The place is well known and very dear to us: we have been going there, off and on, for the past twenty-five years. It is somewhere I can write, undisturbed save for the rustling of the wind in the trees, the singing of birds, and of course the itchiness of mosquito bites, which at least have the advantage of keeping one alert.

Thanks to the place, the cottage, and the forbearance of my family – who made no secret of their disapproval of the fact that I was continually 'working' when I should have been on holiday – I was able in those three magical weeks to convert my disorganised bundle of papers into a virtually finished book. Of place, cottage, and family, the last has of course been a source of continual support, and not just on holiday. My wife Anna, who has had to tolerate a husband often so cocooned in his own thoughts as to be unreachable by any known means of human communication, has worked tirelessly to keep me at least marginally in touch with reality, while my daughter Susanna, who has grown from a little girl to a young adult over the years during which these essays were written, has enlivened us all thanks to her indomitable spirit and a regular regime of family hugs. But during this period the Department of Anthropology, too, has grown, not only through new appointments but also through the arrival of many children, all of whom – parents and children alike – have brought a special vitality to an exceptionally happy and vigorous anthropological community. I thank them all, especially the children, for keeping me young, as I do the many students with whom I have been privileged to work. Their questioning, criticism and insight have been a never-failing source of inspiration. Finally, I thank my cello, which has been a constant if temperamental companion over more years than I can remember. It has, in that time, become so much a part of me and of the way I am that when I think and write, it thinks and writes in me. To that extent, it is truly a co-author of this book.

The majority of the essays making up the book have been previously published. All, however, have been more or less extensively revised for the present volume, principally in order to remove overlap or duplication of material.

Chapter 1 started life as a Distinguished Lecture presented to the General Anthropology Division (GAD) of the American Anthropological Association during the AAA Meetings in Philadelphia, on 4 December, 2009. A highly abbreviated version of the lecture is published in the GAD Bulletin, *General Anthropology* (Volume 17(1), 2010, pp. 1-4). I am grateful to the committee of the GAD, and especially to Emily Schultz and Pat Rice, for inviting me to present the lecture.

Chapter 2 has evolved from a lecture originally presented as part of an advanced undergraduate course at the University of Aberdeen, on *The 4 As: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, and I thank the students taking the course for their inspiring feedback. I also want to thank Stephanie Bunn, whose ideas have greatly influenced my own, and who has been generous in sharing her knowledge and experience as a craftsperson through the workshops she has delivered over the years as part of the *4 As* course. Having converted the lecture into an academic paper, I initially presented it at the 2004 conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group at the University of Glasgow, and subsequently at the seminar on *Materiality in Society and Culture* held at the University of Oslo in November 2005. I thank the participants on both occasions, as well as the staff and students at Stanford University's Department of Archaeology with whom I discussed the paper in February 2006, for their helpful comments. I went on to present it, in what felt at the time like an intellectual suicide mission, to the material culture seminar at University College London. Though my arguments were blown up, I survived, and the paper was eventually published as a discussion article 'Materials against materiality', in the journal *Archaeological Dialogues* (Volume 14(1), 2007, pp. 1–16), together with critical comments from Christopher Tilley, Carl Knappett, Daniel Miller and Björn Nilsson, and my response. I am grateful to all four commentators for their insightful criticisms, to the journal's associate editor Peter van Dommelen and two anonymous reviewers for their excellent advice, and to Cambridge University Press for permission to reproduce the article in its present form. I also thank David Nash for supplying and allowing me to use the photo that appears as Figure 2.2. The photos for Figures 2.1 and 2.3 were taken by Susanna Ingold.

Chapter 3 was originally written and presented as the Beatrice Blackwood Lecture at the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford, on 16 May, 2001. I am most grateful to the Friends of the Pitt-Rivers Museum, and especially to Rosemary Lee, for inviting me to present the lecture. It was subsequently revised and published in the journal *Material Culture* (Volume 9(3), 2004, pp. 315–340). I am grateful to SAGE for permission to reproduce the article in its present form. In revising it for publication I benefited from the advice of many people, including David Anderson, Hastings Donnan, Brian Durrans, Junzo Kawada, John Linstroth, Hayden Lorimer, Katrin Lund, Edward Tenner and Jo Vergunst, along with two anonymous readers. My thanks to all.

Chapter 4, like Chapter 2, evolved from a lecture for the *4 As* course, and was subsequently presented at a research seminar on *Technology and its Social Forms* held at the University of Bergen, Norway, in March 2006. It was written up for publication as a chapter in the volume edited by John R. Dakers, *Defining Technological Literacy: Towards an Epistemological Framework*, published in 2006. For ideas and advice, I am grateful to

Brenda Farnell, Charles Keller and François Sigaut, and for permission to reproduce the chapter I thank the volume's publishers, Palgrave Macmillan (New York).

The essay which now forms **Chapter 5** was first presented at a special symposium in Stockholm to mark Vega Day, 24 April 2004, organised by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography, on the occasion of which I was awarded the Society's Retzius Medal in Gold. I have benefited greatly from conversations with my fellow contributors to the symposium – Alf Hornborg, Nurit Bird-David and Colin Scott – and thank them for their support. The essay was first published, alongside the other three symposium papers, in the journal *Ethnos* (Volume 71(1), 2006, pp. 9–20). I am grateful to the publishers, Routledge, for permission to reproduce it in its present form, and to Agence Altitude for permission to reproduce the image in Figure 5.1, from the work of the aerial photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand.

Chapter 6 was written for the conference *Neurobiology of 'Umwelt': How Living Beings Perceive the World*, sponsored by the IPSEN Foundation, and held in Paris on 18 February, 2008. The conference was a rather frustrating event. Ostensibly, its purpose was to review the concept of *Umwelt*, originally introduced into biology in the early decades of the twentieth century through the writings of Jakob von Uexküll, in the light of recent developments in neuroscience. However with one exception – the philosopher Anne Fagot-Largeault – none of the other contributors appeared to be have read or understood von Uexküll's work. Mistaking the *Umwelt* for an inner mental representation, they failed to appreciate the challenge that von Uexküll's approach to perception poses to mainstream neuro-cognitivism. As the only anthropologist among the speakers, my own contribution was quite out of kilter with the others. I am nevertheless grateful for the opportunity that the conference gave me to straighten out my ideas on perception as a life process. My contribution was subsequently published in 2009, as the final chapter (pp. 141–155) in a volume with the same title as the conference, edited by its organisers, Alain Berthoz and Yves Christen. I am grateful to the volume's publishers, Springer Verlag (Berlin and Heidelberg), for permission to reproduce the chapter in its present form.

Chapter 7 was originally written as a joke. I had been invited to write an epilogue for a collection of papers on the topic of 'material agency', put together by Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris. Reading through the papers, it struck me that their authors – many of whom were in thrall to actor-network theory and enamoured of its jargon – were taking themselves just a little too seriously. It would do no harm, I thought, to poke some gentle fun at the earnestness of their pretensions. The collection, entitled *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach*, was published by Springer Science + Business Media (New York) in 2008, and my

contribution appears on pages 209–15. I am grateful to the publishers for permission to reproduce it here, in a revised form.

Chapters 8 and **9** both began life at a conference on the anthropology of wind, held at the University of Oxford in June 2005. My contribution to the symposium, entitled 'Blowing life: sensing the wind in the animic cosmos', was in fact closely modelled on the essay included here as Chapter 5. It was at this conference, however, that I first produced the sketch that now appears as Figure 9.2, and the comments I received encouraged me to develop the idea further. Following the conference, and thanks to the stimulus it provided, I wrote the paper entirely anew, and presented it for the first time at the seminar on *Landscapes and Liminality*, held at the University of Turku's research station at Kevo, in Finnish Lapland, in January 2006. The paper, by then entitled 'Earth, sky, wind and weather', was first published, alongside other contributions to the original wind conference, in the 2007 special issue of the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (pp. S19–S38), and in the subsequent volume *Wind, Life, Health: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Elisabeth Hsu and Chris Low (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, pp. 17–35). I am most grateful to the volume's editors for their encouragement and support.

Even after it had been published, however, I was not entirely satisfied with the paper. It seemed to fall into two parts that addressed different issues and did not fit together properly. I therefore resolved to develop the first part as a separate essay. This has grown into Chapter 8. The inspiration for this essay goes back to one of a series of seminars on *The Interactive Mind*, sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and held on that occasion at the University of Sheffield (April 2005). During the seminar I heard a presentation on 'Conceptual change in children' by Michael Siegal, and was intrigued by the psychological research he described on children's perceptions of the earth and the sky. I determined there and then to look further into this, and am grateful to Dr Siegal for pointing me towards the relevant literature, which had grown significantly in the intervening years. In developing the essay I have taken account of these further contributions. I presented the result for the first time at a seminar in the Department of Geography at the University of Glasgow on 9 March, 2010, and then as a lecture at the University of Minnesota on 2 April 2010. I am grateful to Hayden Lorimer and Stuart McLean for their respective invitations. In addition, I thank Elsevier for permission to reprint the illustrations that appear as Figures 8.1 and 8.2, from *Cognitive Psychology* 24 (S. Vosniadou & W. F. Brewer, 'Mental models of the earth: a study of conceptual change in childhood', pp. 535–585, 1992). I also thank Gavin Nobes for certain points of clarification and, with the British Psychological Society, for granting me permission to reproduce the image in Figure 8.3 from the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 23 (G. Nobes, A. E. Martin and

G. Panagiotaki, 'The development of scientific knowledge of the Earth', pp. 47–64, 2005).

In Chapter 9, I have taken the remaining sections of my original article, 'Earth, sky, wind and weather', and have revised and added to them by introducing material from another, subsequently published paper entitled 'Bindings against boundaries: entanglements of life in an open world' (*Environment and Planning A*, Volume 40(8), 2008, pp. 1796–1810), which was originally presented as one of a series of lectures at Linacre College, Oxford, in February 2007. I have retained the original title for the Chapter, and am grateful to John Wiley & Sons for allowing me to republish it in its present form. I also thank the Design and Artists Copyright Society (DACS) for permission to reproduce the painting by René Magritte in Figure 9.1, the van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, for permission to reproduce the drawing by Vincent van Gogh in Figure 9.3, the Lower Kuskokwim School District, Alaska, for permission to use the image reproduced in Figure 9.4, and Klaus Weber for supplying and allowing me to use the photo in Figure 9.5.

Chapter 10 has not been previously published. It builds, however, on an earlier paper entitled 'The eye of the storm: visual perception and the weather', published in the journal *Visual Studies* (Volume 20(2), 2005, pp. 97–104). A first draft of the present essay was written for a multidisciplinary symposium on *Landscape in Theory*, held at the University of Nottingham on 26 June, 2008. I have however virtually rewritten it, yet again, for this volume. I am grateful to Stephen Daniels for inviting me to the symposium, to Kenneth Olwig for many inspiring conversations, and to John Thornes for an enlightening correspondence on the painterly rendering of sky and weather.

Chapter 11 began as an off-the-cuff commentary that concluded a landmark conference on *Sound and Anthropology* held at the University of St Andrews in June 2006. I wrote up my notes some months after the conference, and they were published in the following year under the title 'Against soundscape' in a volume edited by Angus Carlyle: *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice* (Paris: Double Entendre, pp. 10–13). I have revised and retitled this brief essay for the present volume.

Chapter 12 has a long history. It was the first in this volume to be drafted, and one of the last to be published. It was initially prepared for a conference on *Space, Culture, Power*, held at the University of Aberdeen in April 2001. I subsequently revised it for a conference on *Space, Spatiality, Technology* held at Napier University, Edinburgh, in December 2004. Since then, it has undergone a number of further revisions, and was eventually published, in 2009, in a long delayed volume of contributions from the original 2001 conference, entitled *Boundless Worlds: An Anthropological Approach to Movement*, edited by Peter Wynn Kirby (Oxford: Berghahn, 2009). I am indebted to Berghahn Books for permission to reproduce the chapter here. It has once again been very much revised.

Chapter 13 was originally written for a session on *The Genealogical Model Reconsidered*, held at the 101st Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association in New Orleans, November 2002. It, too, has undergone numerous revisions, and was finally published in a volume of papers from the session, entitled *Kinship and Beyond*, edited by its original organisers, Sandra Bamford and James Leach (Oxford: Berghahn, 2009). Once again, I am grateful to Berghahn Books for permission to reproduce the chapter in this volume.

Chapter 14 was written for an international conference on *Animal Names*, held at the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Venice, in October 2003. It was published by the institute in 2005, in an eponymous volume of papers from the conference, edited by Alessandro Minelli, Gherardo Ortalli and Glauco Sanga (pp. 159–172). In revising the paper for this volume, I was inspired by the poetry of Alastair Reid. I am grateful to Griet Scheldeman for bringing Reid's remarkable work to my attention.

Chapter 15 has its origins in an exhibition curated by Wendy Gunn, and held at Aberdeen Art Gallery from April through June, 2005. The exhibition, entitled *Fieldnotes and Sketchbooks: Challenging the Boundaries Between Descriptions and Processes of Describing*, was designed to coincide with the 2005 conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists, on *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*, held that year at the University of Aberdeen. I subsequently wrote an essay based on my contribution to the exhibition, which appeared alongside papers from the other contributors in a volume with the same title, under Wendy Gunn's editorship. The volume was published in 2009 by Peter Lang. The title of my contribution (pp. 109–134), like that of my piece in the exhibition, was *12 As*. In revising the essay for the present volume, however, I have reduced the number of As from twelve to seven. I am indebted to Wendy Gunn for her work in putting together both the exhibition and the subsequent book, and to Mike Anusas for introducing me to the work of the eccentric theorist of design, Vilém Flusser.

Chapter 16 was originally written for a special issue of the journal *Visual Studies* (Volume 25(1), 2010, pp. 15–23) on 'Walking, ethnography and arts practice', edited by Sarah Pink, Phil Hubbard, Maggie O'Neill and Alan Radley, and based on contributions to the Roam walking weekend organised by Radar, the Arts Programme of the University of Loughborough, in March 2008. Unable to attend the weekend myself, I first developed the ideas presented in this Chapter for the CUSO (Conférence Universitaire de la Suisse Occidentale) Doctoral Programme workshop on *Literature and the Environment* at the University of Geneva, 16–18 October 2009. I am grateful to the participants in the workshop for an inspiring discussion. Figure 16.1 is reproduced by permission of Historic Collections, King's College, University of Aberdeen, and Figure 16.2 by permission of the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirkkala, Australia (on behalf of the

Marrakulu clan) and of the University of Chicago Press. I thank the publishers of *Visual Studies*, Routledge, for permission to reproduce the article in its present form.

Chapter 17 was written for a special issue of the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* (Volume 34(1), 2010, pp. 91–102) on the ontology of technology, edited by Philip Faulkner, Clive Lawson and Jochen Runde. I wrote the first version in 2007, and revised it two years later in the light of the extremely helpful comments of three anonymous referees. I am grateful to Oxford University Press for permission to reproduce a revised version of the essay in this volume.

Chapter 18 is based on a paper originally written for the conference *Beyond the Whole? Anthropology and Holism in a Contemporary World*, held at Sandbjerg, Denmark, in July 2008. I am most grateful to the organisers of the conference for the invitation to attend, in extraordinarily distinguished company. The paper was subsequently revised in the light of helpful comments from Ton Otto, Nils Bubandt and Anna Tsing, and published (2010) in a volume of contributions from the conference, edited by Ton Otto and Nils Bubandt, entitled *Experiments in Holism: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Anthropology*. The paper has been very extensively revised for the present volume, and while I have kept the original title of 'Drawing together', I have changed the subtitle from 'materials, gestures, lines' to 'doing, observing, describing', so as to better reflect its current foci. I thank the editors of the original volume, and its publishers Wiley-Blackwell (Chichester), for permission to reuse this material.

Chapter 19 began life as the Radcliffe-Brown Lecture for 2007, presented at the University of Edinburgh on 12 March of that year, and at the British Academy in London two days later. It was subsequently revised for publication in the *Proceedings of the British Academy* (Volume 154, 2008, pp. 69–92). Many people assisted me both in the preparation of the lecture and in subsequently revising it for publication. They include Maurice Bloch, Philippe Descola, Keith Hart, Heonik Kwon, Paul Sillitoe, James Urry and David Zeitlyn. I thank them all. To Oxford University Press I am grateful for permission to reproduce the text in an only slightly revised form.

Tim Ingold
Aberdeen
September 2010

Prologue

Chapter 1

Anthropology comes to life

> As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production.
>
> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1977 [1845–6]: 42)

> The only thing that is given to us and that *is* when there is human life is *the having to make it … Life is a task*.
>
> José Ortega y Gasset (1941 [1935]: 200)

> The manner in which we humans *are* on the earth is *Buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means … to dwell.
>
> Martin Heidegger (1971 [1954]: 147)

> For we are made of lines. We are not only referring to lines of writing. Lines of writing conjugate with other lines, life lines, lines of luck or misfortune, lines productive of the variation of the line of writing itself, lines that are *between the lines* of writing.
>
> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2004 [1980]: 215)

Anthropology, in my view, is a sustained and disciplined inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life. Yet generations of theorists, throughout the history of the discipline, have been at pains to expunge life from their accounts, or to treat it as merely consequential, the derivative and fragmentary output of patterns, codes, structures or systems variously defined as genetic or cultural, natural or social. Born of nature, moulded by society, impelled by the promptings of genetic predisposition and guided by the precepts of transmitted culture, human beings are portrayed as creatures whose lives are expended in the fulfilment of capacities bestowed at the outset. Beginning, as Clifford Geertz famously put it, 'with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of life', each of us is supposed to 'end

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in the end having lived only one' (Geertz 1973: 45). Life, in this view, is a movement towards terminal closure: a gradual filling up of capacities and shutting down of possibilities. My own work, over the last quarter of a century, has been driven by an ambition to reverse this emphasis: to replace the end-directed or teleonomic conception of the life-process with a recognition of life's capacity continually to overtake the destinations that are thrown up in its course. It is of the essence of life that it does not begin here or end there, or connect a point of origin with a final destination, but rather that it keeps on going, finding a way through the myriad of things that form, persist and break up in its currents. Life, in short, is a movement of opening, not of closure. As such, it should lie at the very heart of anthropological concern.

Looking back on my efforts to restore anthropology to life, they seem to fall roughly into four phases, each of which revolves around a single key term. The first phase was about the meaning of *production*; the second was about the meaning of *history*. In the third phase I was preoccupied with the notion of *dwelling*. The latest phase – the one I am in now – is an exploration of the idea that life is lived along *lines*. Though they followed one another in time, these phases were by no means discrete. Rather, each carried over into the next. It all began with the question of what it means to say of human beings that they are the producers of their lives. But I did not cease thinking about this question as it gave birth to another: how is it that, in producing their lives, humans create history? How, if at all, is this history to be distinguished from the process of evolution in which all living creatures are supposed to be caught up? Nor did I cease thinking about history as I began to see, in what I called the perspective of dwelling, a way to overcome the entrenched division between the 'two worlds' of nature and society, and to re-embed human being and becoming within the continuum of the lifeworld. And I have not ceased thinking about dwelling in my current explorations in the comparative anthropology of the line, which grew from the realisation that every being is instantiated in the world as a path of movement along a way of life. Or to trace the progression of my thinking in reverse: to lay a path through the world is to dwell; to dwell is to live historically; every historical form of life is a mode of production. In what follows, I shall recapitulate the first three phases of this progression, in their original order, as an introduction to the fourth, which is represented by the essays that comprise the present volume.

Production

I came initially to the question of production through a reflection on how the ways of working of human beings differ from those of non-human animals (Ingold 1983). Over a century previously, Friedrich Engels had been pondering the same thing. In a draft introduction to his unfinished

magnum opus, *Dialectics of Nature*, probably written in 1875–6, Engels argued that the works of humans differ fundamentally from those of other animals, in so far as the former are driven by an 'aim laid down in advance' (Engels 1934: 34). True, human activities are not alone in having significant environmental consequences; moreover the great majority of these consequences, as Engels was the first to admit, are unintended or unforeseen. Nevertheless, returning to the theme in an essay on 'The part played by labour in the transition from ape to man', written around the same time, Engels was convinced that the measure of man's humanity lay in the extent to which things could be contrived to go according to plan. 'The further removed men are from animals', he declared, 'the more their effect on nature assumes the character of premeditated, planned action directed towards definite, preconceived ends' (ibid.: 178). Finally, in another contemporary fragment, Engels conceded that it is the end-directedness of human action that qualifies it as production. 'The most that the animal can achieve is to *collect*; man *produces*, he prepares the means of life … which without him nature would not have produced' (ibid.: 308). To put it another way, irrespective of the actual impact of their activities, animals do not labour in their environment in order to change it. They have no conception of their task. But human beings always work with some notion of what they are doing, and why, even though the results never quite conform to expectations.

This, too, was the conclusion to which Karl Marx had moved in the first volume of *Capital*, published a few years earlier, in 1867. Unlike the spider weaving its web or the bee constructing its cell, the human labour process, said Marx, 'ends in the creation of something which, when the process began, already existed … in an ideal form' (Marx 1930: 170). Yet for Marx, this model of creation presented something of a dilemma. For if the form of a thing must already exist in the imagination before the work of production can even begin, where does this initial image come from? In notes published posthumously as the *Grundrisse*, Marx came up with his answer. It is consumption, he argued, that sets the aims of production. It does so by creating expectations about the forms things should take and the functions they should fulfil, and these expectations, in turn, motivate the productive process. 'If it is clear that production offers consumption its external object', Marx reasoned, 'it is therefore equally clear that consumption ideally posits the object of production as an internal image, as a need, as drive and as purpose' (Marx 1973: 91–2). Or in a nutshell, whereas producing things gives us objects to consume, consuming things gives us ideas of what to produce. The result is a closed circuit, of production and consumption, the one converting pre-existing images into final objects, the other converting objects into images. To ask which comes first, production or consumption, is to pose a chicken and egg question.

Herein lay Marx's dilemma. How could he prove, as his philosophy of materialism required, that production takes precedence over consumption?

Allowing that production and consumption are but phases of one process, he continued to insist, in the *Grundrisse*, that 'production is the real point of departure and hence also the predominant moment' (1973: 94). If that were really so, however, then somewhere along the line products would have miraculously to appear that present to the consumer the need that subsequently motivates their production. In a well-known anthropological critique, Marshall Sahlins scorned Marx's tortuous and ultimately circular attempts to transform, as he put it, 'the pre-existing image of production into its objective consequence' (Sahlins 1976: 153). The source of Marx's discomfiture was a gift to Sahlins, who was out to show, quite to the contrary, that the finalities of production are pre-specified in the symbolic forms of culture. Marx's admission that every act of production has to begin with an image in mind, of what is to be produced, seemed only to prove Sahlins's point. Yet a moment's reflection reveals that Sahlins is trapped in exactly the same circularity as Marx, the only difference being that he has resolved to enter the circle at a diametrically opposed pole. Whereas Marx, the materialist, had to pull objects from a hat in order to set the ball rolling, the culturalist Sahlins has to conjure symbolic representations from thin air. Indeed so long as we assume that there is no more to production than converting images into objects, and no more to consumption that turning objects back into images, there appears to be no escape from the circle. Neither object nor image can take precedence, neither production nor consumption, when each is a precondition for the other.

Yet Marx himself, spelling out the elements of the labour process in *Capital*, hints that there is more. Images do not turn themselves into objects just like that. The process takes time, and as Marx observes, the producer's 'purposive will, manifesting itself as attention, must be operative throughout the whole duration of the labour' (Marx 1930: 170). Moreover as he labours, it is not only the materials with which he works that are transformed.[1] The worker, too, is changed through the experience. Latent potentialities of action and perception are developed. He becomes, even if ever so slightly, a different person. Perhaps, then, the essence of production lies as much or more in the attentional quality of the action – that is, in its attunement and responsiveness to the task as it unfolds – and in its developmental effects on the producer, as in any images or representations of ends to be achieved that may be held up before it. There is indeed a precedent for this view in the earlier collaborative writings of Marx and Engels. In a passage from *The German Ideology*, penned in 1846, they go so far as to equate production with life itself, and every mode of production with a mode of life. 'As individuals express their life', wrote Marx and Engels, 'so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and *how* they produce' (Marx and Engels 1977: 42). Conceived as the attentive movement of a conscious being, bent upon the tasks of life, the productive process is not confined within the finalities

of any particular project. It does not start with an image and finish with an object but carries on through, without beginning or end, punctuated – rather than initiated or terminated – by the forms, whether mental or ideal, that it sequentially brings into being.

Taken in this sense, as I argued in a lecture delivered almost thirty years ago,[2] production 'must be understood *intransitively*, not as a transitive relation of image to object' (Ingold 1983: 15). This is to set the verb 'to produce' alongside other intransitive verbs such as to hope, to grow and to dwell, as against such transitive verbs as to plan, to make and to build. And it is, once and for all, to restore to production the existential primacy that Marx had always sought for it (Ingold 1986: 321–4). Its primacy is that of life itself: of the processes of hoping, growing and dwelling over the forms that are conceived and realised within them. Yet this assertion of the priority of ongoing process over final form, as we shall see, poses a fundamental challenge to the very model of creation to which both Marx and Engels had appealed in order to characterise the distinctively human character of productive labour. Indeed, once we dispense with the prior representation of an end to be achieved as a necessary condition for production, and focus instead on the purposive will or intentionality that inheres in the action itself – in its capacity literally to *pro-duce*, to draw out or bring forth potentials in the person of the producer and in the surrounding world – then there are no longer any grounds to restrict the ranks of producers to human beings alone. Producers, both human and non-human, do not so much transform the world, impressing their preconceived designs upon the material substrate of nature, as play their part from within in the world's transformation of itself. Growing into the world, the world grows in them. And with this, the question concerning production gives way to another, this time about the meaning of history.

History

As he drafted the introduction to his *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels was well aware of the intimate connection between these two questions. There is a limited sense, he admits, in which animals produce, yet without ends in mind, their activity – more or less instinctive – does not really count as production. Likewise, animals may be said to have a history, but such history, Engels wrote, 'is made for them, and in so far as they themselves take part in it, this occurs without their knowledge and desire' (Engels 1934: 34). Only when human beings appear on the stage do we enter history proper: that is, a history they have made themselves in the conscious pursuit of predetermined aims.

Writing over a century later, Maurice Godelier returned to the same theme, in virtually identical terms. Introducing a collection of his essays on *The Mental and the Material* (1986), dedicated to the revival of a Marxian

approach to anthropology, Godelier, too, grants that non-human species have histories of a kind. These natural histories, however, have come about not through any intentional activity on the part of non-humans themselves, but are rather compounded from the reproductive consequences of accidental variations and recombinations of hereditary material along lines of descent. Such histories, of what Charles Darwin had called 'descent with modification', and which his latter-day followers would call 'evolutionary', have taken place *in*, but are in no sense produced *by*, populations of organisms. The human species, of course, has an evolutionary history of this sort, which palaeo-anthropologists have been at pains to unravel. But alone among animals, Godelier insists, humans also have History, which he spells with an upper-case 'H' in order to distinguish it from the lower-case histories of variation under natural selection common to all living kinds (Godelier 1989: 63).

It is a fact about human beings, Godelier asserts (1986: 1), that 'they produce society in order to live'. By this he means that the designs and purposes of human action upon the environment – action that yields a return in the form of the wherewithal for subsistence – have their source in the domain of social relations. But although Godelier takes his inspiration from Marx, in fact Marx does not say that humans produce society. He says they produce themselves and one another. They do so by reciprocally laying down, through their life activities, the conditions for their own growth and development. What they produce, in short, is not society but the ongoing process of social life. As Marx and Engels had put it, in *The German Ideology* (1977: 42), human beings are the what and how of their production: each is the instantiation of a certain way of being alive and active in the world. Or in the words of the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, we should say 'not that man *is*, but that he *lives*' (Ortega y Gasset 1941: 213).

Ortega's writings were much cited by mid-twentieth-century cultural anthropologists in the belief that they lent support to the idea that culture, and not nature, shapes human experience. 'Man', Ortega had famously declared, 'has no nature, what he has is … history' (1941: 217). In an influential work from the same period, entitled *Theoretical Anthropology*, David Bidney objected that this presents us with a false choice. Human nature and cultural history, Bidney argued, are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary. Each depends on the other, and adequate self-knowledge required the comprehension of both (Bidney 1953: 154–5). In reality, however, Ortega's declaration was not about the primacy of culture; it was about the primacy of *life*. Humanity, he is telling us, does not come pre-packaged with species membership, nor does it come from having been born into a particular culture or society. It is rather something we have continually to work at. 'The only thing that is given to us and that is when there is human life', Ortega went on to say, 'is *the having to make it … Life is a task*' (Ortega y Gasset 1941: 200). For both Marx and Ortega, then, what we are,

or what we can be, does not come ready made. We have, perpetually and never-endingly, to be making ourselves. That is what life is, what history is, and what it means to produce. And that, too, for these authors, is what it means to be human. To inquire into human life is thus to explore the conditions of possibility in a world peopled by beings whose identities are established, in the first place, not by received species- or culture-specific attributes but by productive accomplishment.

It was with these thoughts in mind that I returned to the work of Godelier. The thesis he sets out to prove, in *The Mental and the Material*, is that History is wrought in the human transformation of nature. Through their creative action upon the natural environment, Godelier claims, human beings bring about changes not only in their relations with that environment but also in the relations among themselves constitutive of society (Godelier 1986: 1). Entailed in this claim, however, lies a contradiction – perhaps the founding contradiction of the entire edifice of western thought – namely that it has no way of comprehending human beings' creative involvement in the material world, save by taking them out of it. In so far as humans are encompassed *within* this world they are objectively bound to the determinations of an evolved human nature which they had no hand in shaping; conversely they are able to shape their own destinies only in so far as they issue from a historical consciousness that is constituted *without* the material world, in an intersubjective or social domain of mental realities that stands over and above the sheer materiality of nature. Indeed the very concept of the 'human' seems to embody the abiding paradox of a form of life that can realise its own essence only by transcending it. My reflections on the concept of production, however, seemed to offer a potential resolution. If production is not, as Godelier would have it, about transforming the material world, but rather about participating in the world's transformation of itself, then could we not conclude that human beings produce themselves and one another by establishing, through their actions, the conditions for their ongoing growth and development? And might it not be in precisely this mutual establishment of developmental conditions that we find the meaning of history?

Human actions, of course, establish such conditions not only for other humans. They also do so for assorted non-humans. The farmer's work on the fields, for example, creates favourable conditions for the growth of crop plants, and the herdsman's does the same for domestic animals. Moreover, granted that not all producers are human, it is easy to turn the argument around and show how various non-humans contribute, in specific environments, not just to their own growth and development but also to that of human beings. It follows that human social life is not cut out on a separate plane from the rest of nature but is part and parcel of what is going on throughout the organic world. It is the process wherein living beings of all kinds, in what they do, constitute each other's conditions of existence,