

TIM INGOLD

MAKING



ANTHROPOLOGY, ARCHAEOLOGY,
ART AND ARCHITECTURE



ROUTLEDGE

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Anthropology, archaeology, art and
architecture

Tim Ingold



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MAKING

Making creates knowledge, builds environments and transforms lives. Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture are all ways of making. In this exciting book, Tim Ingold ties the four disciplines together in a way that has never been attempted before. Instead of treating art and architecture as compendia of objects for anthropological or archaeological analysis, Ingold advocates a way of thinking through making in which sentient practitioners and active materials continually answer to, or 'correspond', with one another in the generation of form.

Making offers a series of profound reflections on what it means to create things, on materials and form, the meaning of design, landscape perception, animate life, personal knowledge and the work of the hand. It draws on examples and experiments ranging from prehistoric stone tool-making to the building of medieval cathedrals, from round mounds to monuments, from flying kites to winding string, from drawing to writing.

Tim Ingold is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, UK. His books for Routledge include *Lines*, *The Perception of the Environment* and *Being Alive*.

‘In his latest book, Tim Ingold persuasively argues for anthropology’s transformational capacity and promotes serious reflection on the need for anthropologists to correspond *with* the world. His focus on handwork in art, building, and the making of tools beautifully illustrates “thinking through making” and learning by doing. This accessible book makes an excellent and timely contribution to a core area of anthropological research, and invites the reader to engage with the fascinating work emerging from it.’

Trevor Marchand, *School of Oriental and African Studies, UK*

‘Ingold is a joy to read. With *Making*, he continues to enliven the social sciences with his distinctively compelling and critical reflections on anthropological, archaeological, architectural and artistic practices. This volume will be useful to all who are striving to integrate art and research, making and thinking, practice and theory.’

Ian Alden Russell, *David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, USA*

‘For architects it is an absolute must to discover and absorb the work of this friendly outsider whose ideas touch the heart of what we do.’

Lars Spuybroek, *Georgia Institute of Technology, USA*

‘Unafraid to ask bold questions and propose daring answers, Tim Ingold has developed a distinctive voice. In the process, he has staked out an increasingly influential position that touches on a wide range of disciplines.’

Webb Keane, *University of Michigan, USA*

For Anna

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In my mind, and to everyone I have ever talked to about it, this book has always been known as *The 4 As*. The 'A's in question are Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture. I had been teaching a course by this name to mixed groups of advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students for several years, and the idea was to turn it into a book so that I wouldn't have to teach it any more. 'Simple', I assured myself, sometime in 2007. 'I have all my lecture notes and I've read the stuff – it's just a matter of writing up.' In the late summer of 2008 I started writing in earnest, in the couple of months that were left of a period of research leave. I drafted what are now Chapters 3 and 4 of the present work ... and then my time ran out. For the next three years I was saddled with the job of being a Head of School. 'You're a manager now, Tim', said one of my superiors one day – a Vice-Principal, no less – with an evil grin; 'you're one of us.' I shuddered, and thought of *The 4 As*. Would I ever return to them again, I wondered, or had I crossed irrevocably to the 'other side'? I had intended to finish the book first, and then move on to my collection of essays, *Being Alive*. But as it turned out – with many of the essays already written or in an advanced state of completion – the prospects of getting at least the latter book finished looked more realistic. Once again, *The 4 As* was shelved, while in the windows of time I could find, especially during the long hot summer in 2010, I concentrated on *Being Alive*. That left me with a problem, however, because I found that in my haste to complete the essay collection I had 'stolen' many of the ideas that were to have gone into *The 4 As*. It was no good relying on old notes. I would have to move on.

Looking back, I can only be thankful that circumstances forced me to do so. Although the book has been so long in coming, I could not have written it sooner, not least because it builds on ideas that have taken their time to take root, and which have grown through conversations I have had, and work that I have been able to read, only in the last year or two. For example, the idea of correspondence, which plays a central role in this book, only occurred to me in the final stages of revision for *Being Alive*. The result is that the present work is no longer the 'book of the course' that I might have written, based on my lectures, but has become something altogether different. I suppose it has

turned into a kind of statement of my personal philosophy and, at the same time, a protest against the overwrought, puffed up and self-serving phrase-mongering of so much that nowadays passes for scholarship. Words are precious things; they deserve our respect. The inspiration for the book still comes from the course on *The 4 As*, which was by far and away the most rewarding I have ever taught, and my most immediate thanks must go to all the students who have participated in the years since 2003–2004, when I first introduced it. It has been fun, as all teaching should be, and I have learned a huge amount. What eventually made it possible for me to write the book, however, was the leave granted to me after finishing my three-year stint as Head of School. This leave, which commenced in October 2011, is funded for two years by the Leverhulme Trust, and I am immensely grateful to the Trust for its support, without which this book could not have been written. And now that it is finished, I promise to write the book I said I would write in my application! That's the next one.

I started my leave, however, with a very considerable backlog, and it was not until the end of April 2012, during a two-week visit to the University of Vienna, that I was properly able to resume work on this book, which had now assumed the official title of *Making*. Though I had a certain affection for *The 4 As*, I was advised that rather like the creatures of science fiction which can do everything conceivable in the universe except climb stairs, state-of-the-art electronic book distribution systems cannot cope with titles which have numbers in. Moreover *The 4 As* would have been an enigma to anyone not already familiar with the background to the book, whereas *Making* is transparently what the book is about. Its argument is that all four disciplines – anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture – are, or at least could be, ways of thinking through making, as opposed to the making through thinking that, in institutions of higher education, has tended to place theorists and practitioners on opposite sides of the academic fence. I also argue, however, that making things is tantamount to a process of growth. The same applies to writing books. Rain is good for growth, and as the wettest Scottish summer in living memory wore on, the manuscript gradually swelled. But it needed some sunshine for ripening, and once again – as happened with *Being Alive* in the summer of 2010 – the little cottage on the shore of Lake Pielinen, in eastern Finland, came to the rescue. Three weeks of July sunshine, in idyllic surroundings, helped me through the last two chapters. By this stage the book was already telling me what to write rather than the other way around. It is curious how books have minds of their own. All their authors can do is to find the ways they want to go, and follow them. Indeed, I believe this is true of making generally, and one of my principal themes in this book is to demonstrate that this is so. In a nutshell, my thesis is that making is a correspondence between maker and material, and that this is the case as much in anthropology and archaeology as it is in art and architecture.

As ever, for inspiration and assistance in writing this book, I have more people to thank than I could possibly enumerate. To all of the following, however, I owe a particular debt of gratitude: Mike Anusas, Stephanie Bunn, Jen Clarke, Anne Douglas, Caroline Gatt, Cesar Giraldo Herrera, Wendy Gunn, Rachel Harkness, Elizabeth Hodson, Raymond Lucas, Christel Mattheeuws, Elizabeth Ogilvie, Amanda Ravetz, Cristian Simionetti and Jo Vergunst. I am also indebted to Lesley Riddle, commissioning editor at Routledge, for her unfailing support and patience in the face of an author who has so consistently promised and failed to deliver on time, and to Katherine Ong for bearing

with me through to the production process. For some of the chapters, I have raided material that I have presented or published elsewhere, though not without substantial revision. Thus a fragment of Chapter 1 comes from my chapter ‘The 4As (anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture): reflections on a teaching and learning experience’, in *Ways of Knowing: New Approaches in the Anthropology of Knowledge and Learning*, ed. M. Harris, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 287–305, 2007. Some sections of Chapter 2 appear, in a rather preliminary form, in my article ‘Toward an ecology of materials’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41: 427–442, 2012, and parts of Chapter 5 appear in two introductory pieces (‘Introduction: the perception of the user-producer’, in *Design and Anthropology*, eds. W. Gunn and J. Donovan, Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 19–33, 2012; and ‘Introduction’, in *Imagining Landscapes: Past, Present and Future*, eds. M. Janowski and T. Ingold, Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 1–18, 2012). Chapter 6 owes a certain amount to my chapter ‘The round mound is not a monument’, in *Round Mounds and Monumentality in the British Neolithic and Beyond*, eds. J. Leary, T. Darvill and D. Field, Oxford: Oxbow Books, pp. 253–260, 2010. Chapter 7 incorporates a couple of paragraphs from the *Annual Review* article cited above, and a few paragraphs of Chapter 9 come from my ‘Introduction’ to *Redrawing Anthropology: Materials, Movements, Lines*, ed. T. Ingold, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 1–20. The rest is new.

I dedicate this book to my most constant supporter and most unsparing critic in all things, who – by the time this book is published – will have put up for over forty years with an incorrigibly academic husband whose thoughts are always somewhere other than where they ought to be.

Tim Ingold
Aberdeen, August 2012

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1

KNOWING FROM THE INSIDE

Learning to learn

Know for yourself! That was oftentimes the only advice my companions would offer when, as a novice fieldworker among Saami people in north-eastern Finland some forty years ago, I was stuck as to how to proceed with some practical task. At first I thought they were just being unhelpful, or unwilling to divulge what they knew perfectly well. But after a while I realised that, quite to the contrary, they wanted me to understand that the only way one can really know things – that is, from the very inside of one's being – is through a process of self-discovery. To know things you have to grow into them, and let them grow in you, so that they become a part of who you are. Had my companions offered formal instruction by explaining what to do, I would have had only the pretence of knowing, as I would find out the moment I tried to do as I was told. The mere provision of information holds no guarantee of knowledge, let alone of understanding. Things, as proverbial wisdom has it, are easier said than done.

It is, in short, by watching, listening and feeling – by paying attention to what the world has to tell us – that we learn. My companions did not inform me of *what* is there, to save me the trouble of having to inquire for myself. Rather, they told me *how I might find out*. They taught me what to look for, how to track things, and that knowing is a process of active following, of *going along*. These were people who had always lived by fishing, hunting and herding reindeer, so for them the idea that you know as you go – not that you know by means of movement but that knowing *is* movement – was second nature. To me it was not, and yet it must have somehow wormed its way into me, without my even realising it at the time, for when I look back I can see how it has guided my thinking and my preference for some philosophies over others. Would I be thinking in the same way had I not undergone this formative experience of fieldwork very early on in my career? That is impossible to say. I would have to rerun the past four decades without that experience to see whether the results would be the same or different. But for my part, I can find no other explanation.

Our task, in a situation such as that in which I found myself, is one of learning to learn. Gregory Bateson – anthropologist, cybernetician and general intellectual

maverick – called it ‘deutero-learning’ (Bateson 1973: 141). This kind of learning aims not so much to provide us with facts *about* the world as to enable us to be taught *by* it. The world itself becomes a place of study, a university that includes not just professional teachers and registered students, dragooned into their academic departments, but people everywhere, along with all the other creatures with which (or whom) we share our lives and the lands in which we – and they – live. In this university, whatever our discipline, we learn *from* those *with* whom (or which) we study. The geologist studies with rocks as well as professors; he learns from them, and they tell him things. So too the botanist with plants and the ornithologist with birds. And anthropologists? They also study with those among whom they stay, if only for a while. Learning to learn, for them as for the practitioners of any other discipline, means shaking off, instead of applying, the preconceptions that might otherwise give premature shape to their observations. It is to convert every certainty into a question, whose answer is to be found by attending to what lies before us, in the world, not by looking it up at the back of the book. In thus feeling forward rather than casting our eyes rearwards, in anticipation rather than retrospection, lies the path of discovery.

This book is anchored in the discipline of anthropology. Surely the most anti-academic of academic disciplines, anthropology could not be sustained were it not for the institutions of learning and scholarship in which most of its practitioners spend the greater part of their working lives. Yet at the same time, it is largely devoted to challenging the principal epistemological claim upon which the legitimacy of these institutions is founded, and that continues to underwrite their operations. This is the claim of the academy to deliver an authoritative account of how the world works, or to reveal the reality behind the illusion of appearances. In the academic pantheon, reason is predestined to trump intuition, expertise to trump common sense, and conclusions based on the facts to trump what people know from ordinary experience or from the wisdom of their forbears. The mission of anthropology has long been to turn this pantheon on its head. It is to start from the presumption that if anyone knows anything about the ways of the world, then it will be those who have devoted their lives – as have their ancestors – to following them. Therefore, say anthropologists, it is by seeking to understand these ways of life, and by acquiring for ourselves some of the knowledge and skills required to practise them, that we have most to learn. Armed with this learning, and with the critical perspectives it opens up, we can turn our sights back on the academy and, as it were, cut it down to size by revealing the limitations inherent in its own knowledge practices.

Anthropology and ethnography

In anthropology, then, we go to study *with* people. And we hope to learn *from* them. What we might call ‘research’ or even ‘fieldwork’ is in truth a protracted masterclass in which the novice gradually learns to see things, and to hear and feel them too, in the ways his or her mentors do. It is, in short, to undergo what the ecological psychologist James Gibson calls an *education of attention* (Gibson 1979: 254; cf. Ingold 2001). But besides subjecting themselves to this kind of education, many fieldworkers are committed to documenting the lives and times of their host communities. This work of documentation is known as *ethnography*. More often than not, anthropologist and

ethnographer are combined in one and the same person, and the tasks of anthropology and ethnography proceed in tandem. They are not the same, however, and their persistent confusion has caused no end of trouble. We need to sort this trouble out.

It helps to be able to think through an example, so I have made one up for the purpose. As an amateur cellist I used to dream, quite unrealistically of course, that I would one day go to study with the great Russian master of the instrument, Mstislav Rostropovich. I would sit at his feet, observe and listen, practise and be corrected. After a year or two of this, I would return with a much enriched understanding of the possibilities and potentials of the instrument, of the depths and subtleties of the music, and of myself as a person. This, in turn, would open up paths of musical discovery that I could continue to travel for years to come. Now suppose that instead, having perhaps read for a degree in musicology, I decided to carry out a study of prominent Russian cellists. The idea would be to find out what factors had set them on this particular path, how their subsequent careers had unfolded, what the major influences had been on their lives and ways of playing, and how they saw themselves and their work in the contexts of contemporary society. I would plan to spend some time with Rostropovich, using my cello as a kind of entry ticket to gain access to him and his circle, and in the hope of gathering information relevant to my study, whether through casual conversation or more formal interviews. I would do the same for a number of other cellists on my list, albeit not so famous. And I would come home with a lot of material to work on for my projected thesis: *Bears on Strings: Cellists and Cello-Playing in Contemporary Russia*.

I do not mean to deny that a study of the latter kind could make a valuable contribution to musicological literature. It could increase our knowledge of an otherwise little-studied topic. It might even have earned me a doctorate! My point is not that the first project is better than the second, but simply that they are fundamentally different. Let me highlight three differences that are crucial for what I want to say, by analogy, about ethnography and anthropology. First, in project one I study *with* Rostropovich and learn *from* his way of playing, whereas project two is a study *of* Rostropovich in which I learn *about* it. Second, in project one I take what I have learned and move *forward*, all the while of course reflecting on my earlier experience. In project two, by contrast, I look *back* over the information I have collected, in order to account for trends and patterns. And thirdly, the impetus that drives project one is primarily *transformational*, whereas the imperatives of project two are essentially *documentary*. To put it rather crudely, these are also the differences between anthropology and ethnography. Anthropology is studying with and learning from; it is carried forward in a process of life, and effects transformations within that process. Ethnography is a study of and learning about, its enduring products are recollective accounts which serve a documentary purpose.

Now in proposing this distinction, I do not mean to belittle ethnography. Many colleagues, I know, will protest that to regard ethnography as mere documentation is to take far too narrow a view of it. They will insist that ethnography is a much broader and richer endeavour than I have made out, and even that it should be taken to include everything that I have just brought under the rubric of anthropology. Not only anthropology but also ethnography, they will say, is transformational: the ethnographer is changed by the experience, and this change is carried forward into his or her future work. Hence in their view, ethnography and anthropology are practically indistinguishable. But to this I answer that there is nothing 'mere' about

descriptive documentation. Ethnographic work is complex and demanding. It may even be transformational in its effects upon the ethnographer. These are side effects, however, and are incidental to its documentary purpose. Indeed, if anything belittles ethnography, or makes it seem less than what it really is, it is the usurpation of its name for other ends. After all, 'description of the people' is what ethnography (from *ethnos* = 'people'; *graphia* = 'description') literally *means*. If ethnography has in practice become something different from description, then by what name should the task of description be known? It can be hardly more emphatically devalued than by being left nameless and unrecognised. Nor is that all, for as I shall show in a moment, to conflate the objectives of documentation and transformation is to leave anthropology impotent in the fulfilment of its critical mandate.

For the present, I wish only to insist that the distinction – in terms of objectives – between the documentary and the transformational is absolutely *not* congruent with that between empirical and theoretical work. It is almost a truism to say that there can be no description or documentation that is innocent of theory. But by the same token, no genuine transformation in ways of thinking and feeling is possible that is not grounded in close and attentive observation. This book is a case in point. It is not an ethnographic study, and indeed makes very little reference to ethnography at all. That does not, however, make it a work of theory. Rather, my entire argument is set against the conceit that things can be 'theorised' in isolation from what is going on in the world around us, and that the results of this theorising furnish hypotheses to be applied in the attempt to make sense of it. It is this conceit that sets up what the sociologist C. Wright Mills, in a celebrated essay on intellectual craftsmanship, denounced as a false separation between ways and means of knowing. There can, Mills argued, be no distinction between the theory of a discipline and its method; rather, both are 'part of the practice of a craft' (1959: 216). Anthropology, for me, is such a practice. If its method is that of the practitioner, working with materials, its discipline lies in the observational engagement and perceptual acuity that allow the practitioner to follow what is going on, and in turn to respond to it. This is the method, and the discipline, known in the trade as *participant observation*. It is one of which anthropologists are justly proud. Participant observation, however, is a practice of anthropology, not of ethnography (Hockey and Forsey 2012), and, as I shall show below, anthropologists do themselves a disservice by confusing the two.

Participant observation

It is not anthropology's purpose to describe the specificity of things as they are: that, I have argued, is a task for ethnography. But nor is it to generalise from these descriptions: 'to account', as anthropologist Dan Sperber (1985: 10–11) would have it, 'for the variability of human cultures' by resort to 'ethnographic data'. It is rather to open up a space for generous, open-ended, comparative yet critical inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life. It is to join with people in their speculations about what life *might* or *could* be like, in ways nevertheless grounded in a profound understanding of what life *is* like in particular times and places. Yet the speculative ambition of anthropology has been persistently compromised by its surrender to an academic model of knowledge production according to which lessons learned through observation and practical participation are recast as empirical material for subsequent

interpretation. In this one, fateful move, not only is anthropology collapsed into ethnography, but the entire relation between knowing and being is turned inside out. Lessons in life become ‘qualitative data’, to be analysed in terms of an exogenous body of theory.

Whenever positivistically minded social scientists speak of ‘qualitative and quantitative methods’ – or even more obscenely, of ‘quant/qual’ – and point to their essential complementarity as though a mix of both would be advantageous, this inversion is at work. To make matters worse, they then recommend participant observation as an appropriate tool for collecting the qualitative component of the dataset. This is to add insult to injury! For participant observation is *absolutely not* a technique of data collection. Quite to the contrary, it is enshrined in an ontological commitment that renders the very idea of data collection unthinkable. This commitment, by no means confined to anthropology, lies in the recognition that we owe our very being to the world we seek to know. In a nutshell, participant observation is a way of knowing *from the inside*. As science studies scholar Karen Barad (2007: 185) has eloquently put it: ‘We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because “we” are *of* the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming.’¹ Only because we are already *of* the world, only because we are fellow travellers along with the beings and things that command our attention, can we observe them. There is no contradiction, then, between participation and observation; rather, the one depends on the other.

But to convert what we owe to the world into ‘data’ that we have extracted from it is to expunge knowing from being. It is to stipulate that knowledge is to be reconstructed on the *outside*, as an edifice built up ‘after the fact’, rather than as inhering in skills of perception and capacities of judgement that develop in the course of direct, practical and sensuous engagements with our surroundings. It is this move that – by situating the observer on the outside of the world of which he or she seeks knowledge – sets up what is often alleged to be the ‘paradox’ of participant observation, namely that it requires of the researcher to be both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the field of inquiry at one and the same time. This paradox, however, does no more than restate the existential dilemma that lies at the heart of the very definition of humanity which underpins normal science. *Human beings*, according to science, are a species of nature, yet to *be human* is to transcend that nature. It is this transcendence that both provides science with the platform for its observations and underwrites its claim to authority. The dilemma is that the conditions that enable scientists to *know*, at least according to official protocols, are such as to make it impossible for them to *be* in the very world of which they seek knowledge. It seems that we can only aspire to truth about this world by way of an emancipation that takes us from it and leaves us strangers to ourselves.

In any appeal to data, whether quantitative or qualitative, this division between realms of knowing and of being is presupposed. For it is already taken for granted that the world is given to science not as part of any offering or commitment but as a reserve or residue that is there for the taking. Disguised as social scientists we enter this world either by stealth, feigning invisibility, or under false pretences by claiming we have come to learn from teachers whose words are heeded not for the guidance they have to offer but as evidence of how they think, of their beliefs or attitudes. Then, as soon as we have filled our bags, we cut and run. This, in my estimation, is fundamentally unethical. It is to turn our backs upon the world in which we live and to which we