

# From *inter-action* to *correspondance*

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*Bodies on the Run* is taken from the anthropologist Tim Ingold's most current volume of work that aims at a more reflexive and philosophical approach to that of his applied work within the context of social and cultural anthropology. The chapter offers a useful philosophical reflection upon the study of human artefacts by situating their study within an 'animistic' ontology rather than that of a pre-dominant materialistic ontology that he sees as underpinning a large number of approaches across disciplines that study material culture. Ingold's animism is in many ways informed by the nineteenth century vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1941) both through his own readings of Bergson's work (within this and earlier works) as well as through the use of philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. This Bergsonian flavour to Ingold's writing is particularly evident in the descriptions of the 'creative force' of kinaesthetic (or phenomenal) experience in shaping the very structure of the material world, a vital force that Ingold also attributes to the 'animate' material world itself; and the importance of the duration and renewal of human and non-human artefacts as a part of an on-going, emergent, phenomenal world of human experience.

Of particular relevance are Ingold's notions of correspondence — that reconfigure a subject-object dichotomy between the phenomenal world and the external world; and transduction, that describes the manipulation and experience of artefacts not in terms of an interaction but in terms of a conversion of kinetic energy between registers of the organic

and inorganic. These philosophical ideas Ingold uses to reflect upon some central topics such as mind, agency and object that lie at the centre of archaeology, anthropology, and architecture.

Drawing inspiration from the discourses of performance and dance, Ingold begins his narrative by attending to what it may mean to talk of the body as 'being alive' by contrasting two very different ideas; embodiment and animism of which the idea of 'life' is fundamentally different. For Ingold, the term 'embodiment' (and the focus within the discourses that use the term) suggests that our experience is packaged within the activity, performance and development of the body, a body that has a formal architecture that can be described by atomists and psychologists. For performance, Ingold finds, experience is not packaged in such a way, the body is not so much a body that moves, it is rather a thing that is composed in and through movement — it is animate — experience is always emergent within an ongoing response with a world that acts back — a correspondence. The body, and experience, is always something that is moving, under its own intentions and desires, but is also something that is always also moved by the environment and other objects. Where we have bodies (indeed we could say we are our bodies) Ingold suggests, we should follow the performance artist just as much as the psychologist or anatomist, and begin upon the premise that the body is not something to think solely about but rather something to begin to think from or indeed through. We should follow the performance artist just as much as the psychologist or anatomist, and begin upon the premise that the body is not something to think solely about but rather something to begin to think from or indeed through.

The correspondence (to that of a world that is always moving) that emerges through thinking from or through a body, for Ingold, finds a particular voice within the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and the premise that the artisan thinks from or through materials. The body, for Ingold, is a thing just as much as materials and artefacts, and to recognise so is not to think in terms of relations between bodies and things (in which the body is the agent or origin of creative activity) but to highlight how the 'us' and the 'it' slip inside each other — they are

always in a correspondence with the body (together with its phenomenology, with what is possible for the body, characterised through its volition), just as the body is in correspondence with them. This rejection of a hard subject object dichotomy leads Ingold (p. 94) to suggest a solution to a representational conception of the external world, not as a world already thrown, a world of objects and properties already cast in fixed forms that pre-exists and responds to us, but as a world that is always in a throwing, a world that is brought forth for and through a body (in terms of what is of interest and available) through ongoing social and phenomenal projects.

The term correspondence (pp. 106-107) that is central to Ingold's text is inspired by the Romantic writing of Charles Baudelaire as well as the work of Wolfgang von Goethe, who describe how if the relation between sunlight and the vision of the eye were not sun-like, it could not see the sun. But, Ingold makes clear, this correspondence is a complex reciprocal correspondence, it is also the other way around — the sun, he points out is more 'eye-like' in that the sky, the sun and any celestial light could only exist in the world of experience (as an *Umwelt* following Jakob von Uexküll) of creatures with eyes and an experience of having eyes. As the bee corresponds to the pollen-bearing flower, and the spider with a fly, the lives of creatures and their *Umwelt* proceed contrapuntally, each taking on something of the characteristics of the other. In this regard Ingold suggests, quite radically, that the idea of the 'properties' of the material world that correspond to the phenomenal world of the organism are not so much 'properties' (in the hard mechanistic sense) but rather 'qualities' — emergent states that take on the characteristics of the material world as well as the characteristics of the phenomenal world that come into correspondence.

Where the recognition of the reduction of things to objects (what Ingold sees as the result of the maintenance of a hylomorphic model of creativity) that cuts of a vitality or agency of materials has led to the emergence of the concept of 'object agency' within many discourses that deal with material culture, Ingold's approach to this discourse differs in a fundamental way. The current appeal to an 'object agency' within

the study of material culture, for Ingold, is a corollary to the logic of embodiment within the study of human experience; it turns things in on themselves, arriving at a materialism that whilst having an agency, remains static, fixed and dependent upon physical properties of a world already cast. Such 'objectness' is not 'alive' in the animistic sense, as it does not allow for a correspondence with that of the world of human experience, it has no animate life itself, an animate life which, for Ingold, must comprise an ever-unfolding state of potentials in relation to the phenomenal world that includes multiple bodies that correspond and are always in correspondence to.

At the centre of Ingold's overarching discussion lies a crucial challenge for how to conceptualise what is meant by 'mind', particularly within the study of material culture, when emphasis is placed upon the affective dimensions of materials — the active and responsive qualities of materials — and their cognitive efficacy. Through recognising the importance of current discussions within archaeology regarding the material agency of matter in the formation of cognitive structures (Malafouris, 2013), particularly within enactive conceptions of mind as an emergent property of an organism-environment system, Ingold reiterates a well-trodden path within the current study of material culture asking where does 'mind' lie? Is it in the interaction between brain, body and world? Is it in their (emergent) correspondence as a holistic self-organising system? Or should we rather, following thinking within some areas of archaeology, do away with the term 'mind' altogether as an unnecessary burden that attempts to demarcate processes that are possibly to elusive and vast to ever fully capture? Ingold's answer follows the later, and is based upon the supposition that to 'think' (following enactive conceptions of mind) is to do so through movement; caught up in a dynamic flow a kinaesthetic, phenomenological, volitional activity including a felt experience of the body that always corresponds with active and responsive animate materials and environmental conditions (pp. 98-99).

Where some theorists within the study of material culture may describe a 'dance of agency' (p. 100) to account for the constant interaction

between human, non-human and material objects, Ingold finds this closing off of worlds — in which each object is already cast as an agent — to be too restrictive and materialistic, describing rather a ‘dance of animacy’ (pp. 100-101). Beginning from the premise of a correspondence — shifting the focus of study away from the interactions between body and world to how they correspond — the potters feeling flows in and out of correspondence with the clay, a herdsman’s in correspondence with the airborne rope, a kite-flyer’s running with the wind. The kite-flyer’s dance with the air cannot be a dance of agency — as the air itself cannot be a ‘closed’ third party agent (as the theory of embodiment holds) to that of the kite and the kite flyer — the air ‘breathes’ it is open, and the kite and the kite flyer dance with the air not through an interaction but through a correspondence:

The kite, in effect, sets up a correspondence between the animate movements of the flyer and the currents of the aerial medium in which he or she is immersed. It is not that you need air to interact with a kite; rather, you need a kite to correspond to the air. (Ingold, 2013, p. 101)

To correspond with the world, Ingold describes, is not to inter-act with the world (that is to act between separate entities or objects as agents) but rather to answer it through a mixing of the movements of ones sentient awareness with the flows and currents of the animate life of the environment (p. 108). Drawing an analogy with that of playing the cello (pp. 102-103), Ingold describes how to perform music is not to interact with the cello (as an agent interacts with another agent), but rather it is to correspond with the cello through the emergent medium of sound — the players gestures describe a melodic line that is transduced (the conversion of a ductus or kinetic quality of gesture) from one register, bodily kinesthesia, to another, of material flux of stings wood and soundbox. It is this mixing of sentience and materials (that also have their own sentience), this transduction, that become indistinguishable within the process of both making artefacts (such a ‘mixing’ the essence of making itself) and experiencing artefacts.

In taking up a challenge of what he sees as a complex process of animism involved with our experience and creative activity, Ingold points to an animate process that does not end with a finished object but continues to become — it endures or has a duration — given new life through being experienced — a new melding of characteristics, a process that requires attention to be paid to the kinaesthetic, phenomenological realms of human experience as well as the world of animate materials and matter that correspond. The intertwining of the worlds of the phenomenological and material that always correspond have particular implications for how we may approach an archaeology of media forms. An artefact's ontogenesis, following Ingold, cannot be fully described as imposed upon materials (traced back to the creators aspirations and ideas) but is rather a correspondence of materials and volitions through movement, that also includes another correspondence to those who further experience the artefact. For Ingold, "to view a work means to join the artist as a fellow traveller, to look with it as it unfolds in the world" (p. 96), it is precisely because a work is never truly 'finished' (except in the minds of those who require it to be so) that it remains alive, constantly re-animated through the experience of those who look with it. A key component of the vitality of a work is to be found within an agency (or rather an animacy) of the experience of the work just as much as the human and non-human animacy behind its creation, a constant and changing play of animacies that Ingold extends to the material object itself — the work of art is not 'dead' or 'finished', but living, constantly unfolding and re-emerging anew though an endless dance of animacy.

#### Works Cited:

Malafouris, L. (2013) *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement*. London: The MIT Press.