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Forms of Dwelling

20 Years of Taskscapes in Archaeology

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edited by

Ulla Rajala and Philip Mills

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Front cover: A postcard with a view of Odda and Sørfjorden from c. 1890–1900 (Library of Congress).

Back cover: From left: River Shannon (K. Driscoll); fishing cottage on the headland Keimiöniemi (T. Äikäs); part of the quarried diabase dyke at Stakalleneset (A. J. Nyland).

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Chapter 2

Taking taskscape to task

Tim Ingold

I

Many years ago – it must have been in 1990–1 – I found myself in front of a large class of students at the University of Manchester, attending their first lectures in social anthropology. I was trying to explain to them what the subject was about. Social anthropology, I said, is the study of social life in all its variety. But social life, since it is the ocean in which we all swim, is not something we can readily grasp. How could I instil into the students the special kind of apperception that would hold a mirror to the world in which they could see reflected the play of lives lived in association? How could I get them to recognise the social not as an add-on to their separate existence as individuals but as the very matrix from which all human life springs? Then I remembered having once seen a painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, entitled *The Battle Between Carnival and Lent*. The painting, dating from the mid-sixteenth century, depicts a teeming medley of activities in a busy market square in Flanders during festival time. Between the inn on one side of the square and the church on the other, and populated by men, women and children of every conceivable shape, size and condition, all social life is there: buying and selling, begging and the giving of alms, fish-mongering and butchery, food preparation of every kind, play-acting and music-making, gaming and dancing, singing, shouting, and fornication (Fig. 2.1). This, I thought, would be the perfect illustration for my next lecture. I loaned a slide of the painting from the University's Department of Art History, and had it projected on the screen of the lecture theatre. 'There', I announced proudly to the assembled mass of gaping students; 'that is social life, and it is what we social anthropologists study!'

I no longer have my lecture notes and cannot recall exactly what I said next, but it was along the following lines: that this is not a painting of a landscape. Typically, the landscape painting depicts a world at rest, a scene whose tranquility is scarcely ruffled by the appearance of solitary human figures that are dwarfed by its immensity. *The Battle Between Carnival and Lent* is just the opposite. Not only is the depiction crowded with people, with buildings and other features such as trees relegated to the



Fig. 2.1: The Battle Between Carnival and Lent (1559) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, reproduced by permission of KHM-Museumsverband).

background. It is also a depiction of activity. Everyone is doing something. Though the picture is silent, just imagine what it would have been like had you been present at the scene! You would hardly have been able to make yourself heard above the hubbub. Every character is engaged in some kind of task, and you can usually tell what it is from the clothes they wear, the materials they are working with, the equipment they carry, and – had you been there – from the noises they make. These tasks, moreover, are not carried on in isolation. Perhaps the beggar on all fours, howling in impotent rage at the injustice of the world, is on his own, for no-one seems to pay the slightest heed to his misery. But others are locked in attitudes of mutual attention, such that their activities, as they are carried on, continually answer to those of others. What Bruegel has painted, then, is an array of mutually responsive tasks, or in a word, a *taskscape*. Geographers may be interested in the formation and character of the landscape, but for us social anthropologists, I suggested, it is the taskscape – this array of activities that weave in and out of one another, variably in harmony and in discord – that is the focus of our attention.

I did not, in the lecture, take the idea any further. It was meant to be purely demonstrative, a way to get my point across. At the time, however, my own thoughts

were in turmoil. Indeed I remember that year of 1990–1 as one of personal depression and intellectual upheaval. What had thrown me off balance was the realisation that the world we live in cannot be neatly partitioned – as I, like almost everyone else, had assumed until then – between two domains, respectively of physical objects and intentional subjects, of nature and society. Only a few years previously, introducing a set of essays on *The Appropriation of Nature*, I had confidently asserted that for intelligent human beings, and for them alone, the objective properties of the world are revealed as such, as comprising what might be called a landscape or habitat. The animal perceives only what the objects of its world afford; humans see them for what they really are and only then – through acts of appropriation – purpose what might be done with them. And how then do humans see other humans? In acrobatics one man may stand upon another’s shoulders, using his comrade as a workman treats a ladder, but it is the fact – I argued – that both men are part of a team and that the act is performed in fulfilment of a common purpose that lifts it above comparable instances of intra-species cooperation in the animal kingdom. For the human acrobat, I intimated, his colleagues are not just usable objects but fellow subjects, or *persons*, and it is this that makes their relations not just cooperative but fundamentally social. Cooperative relations are inter-objective, but social relations are intersubjective (Ingold 1986, 2–5). And as we can see from the motley activities depicted in Bruegel’s *The Battle Between Carnival and Lent*, social life is no more or less than an acrobatics – more improvisatory, perhaps, and less precise in its coordination – that has spilled out and proliferated upon the worldly stage.

II

Thinking along these lines, the idea of taskscape was hardly revolutionary. It involved nothing more than the nomination of a counterpart, in the domain of society, to the idea of landscape in its application to the domain of nature. Landscape was to taskscape, then, as nature to society. But at the very moment when I proposed the term in my Manchester lectures, the foundations on which it rested were already falling apart. For having started from the entirely reasonable premise that human beings are both organisms in a world of ecological relations and persons in a world of social relations, I had come to what seemed like a thoroughly unreasonable conclusion, namely that unlike all other animals, humans live a split-level existence: half in nature, half out; half organism, half person. How can we possibly exist both inside the world of nature and outside it, in society – that is, as organisms and persons – at one and the same time? It eventually dawned on me that human beings could be both organisms and persons simply because being an organism and being a person, far from instantiating ontologically distinct conditions, are *one and the same*.¹ Quite simply, the person is the organism. Looking back, I realised that like so many others, I had been misled by the lazy habit of putting the word ‘mere’ before organism. This made it sound as though the organic is but a physical or material residue, what is left after everything valuable

and essential about human being has been creamed off. To say of any non-human creature that it is an organism is entirely fair: it is to acknowledge its participation in a world of living beings. To say that it is a *mere* organism, however, is to enter a claim for the human as having uniquely broken through the limits of this world, onto a superior and transcendent plane of existence denied to beings of other kinds. And it is of course this claim that sustains the division between society and nature.

Throughout the 1980s I had been teaching an advanced undergraduate course in social anthropology entitled 'Environment and Technology', later renamed 'Environment and Economy'. 'Environment' was about how human beings were caught up with organisms of other kinds in a web of life; 'economy' about how they were caught up with persons of other groups in holding and exchanging what the environment had to offer for their collective livelihood. The course was explicitly designed and presented as an exploration of the dialectical interplay between these two sets of relations, respectively ecological and social. The word landscape scarcely figured in it, save occasionally as a rough synonym for habitat, while taskscape – since I had yet to coin the term – figured not at all. Instead, the operative words were *environment* and *society*. In the literature we read for the course, there was never any suggestion that 'environment' could be anything other than the physical world of nature, nor any doubt that 'society', while perhaps resting on a natural foundation, represented an entirely different order of being. But by 1990–91, my teaching for the course had reached an impasse; that fateful year proved to be the last in which it was taught, never to be revived. The problem was this: if organism and person are the same, then how are we to understand the inhabited world? It can neither be an environment in the purely physical sense; nor can it be society in a sense that is purely sociological. Might a way forward perhaps be found in the concept of landscape? Later in that year I received an invitation from Richard Bradley to contribute to a session he was planning on time and landscape at the Conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group to be held at the University of Leicester in December 1991, and I used the opportunity to try this idea out.

So far as I can recall, what I presented there was barely a sketch, and the real work of writing the paper that eventually became 'The temporality of the landscape' (henceforth ToL, Ingold 1993)² proceeded erratically over much of the following year. I found it monumentally difficult, not least because of my own depressed state of mind at the time. As I struggled to articulate what it might mean to inhabit a landscape in a sense at once personal and organic, intentional and vital, my throwaway idea of taskscape came back to mind. And so too did the art of Bruegel. I had on my study wall a framed reproduction, of rather poor quality, of *The Harvesters* – one of a series of twelve paintings that Bruegel produced, each depicting a month of the year. *The Harvesters* depicts the month of August (Fig. 2.2). I had picked up my reproduction from the local public library, which used to loan pictures like this and was selling off surplus stock. As I worked, I would often find myself looking up at this picture: I would imagine myself as a time-travelling anthropologist, a participant observer in



Fig. 2.2: *The Harvesters* (1565) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1919, www.metmuseum.org*).

the landscape it depicted.³ That the picture was of a landscape, however, was for me – at least initially – not in doubt. And yet I had used another painting of Bruegel’s, his *The Battle Between Carnival and Lent*, to illustrate my idea of the taskscape. Are these pictures really so different, I wondered? Both are by the same artist, painted only six years apart; in both, life is going on; and both depictions are anchored not only to place but also to time. Might the landscape of *The Harvesters* be a taskscape as well? And if so, could these two kinds of ‘scape’ be somehow merged? If only they could, I thought, this could solve my problem of how to understand the inhabited world of the organism-person in a way that would override or even dissolve the barrier between nature and society. The solution I eventually found was that they could indeed be merged, but only by restoring taskscape to the textures of the land, and landscape to the current of time.

III

It so happened that for reasons largely unconnected with my own intellectual travails, the early 1990s saw a noticeable upsurge of interest in landscape, both in prehistoric

archaeology and in social anthropology (see, for example, Bender 1993 and Tilley 1994 in archaeology; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995 in social anthropology). But unlike earlier anthropological writings on 'environment', that had largely taken their bearings from the natural sciences and especially from plant and animal ecology, the new wave of landscape studies were inspired by recent writings in cultural geography and the history of art, which drew their intellectual resources principally from the humanities. In these writings, landscape seemed to have leapt the fence that traditionally divided the physical world of nature from its imagined representations, and had come down firmly on the other side. Much was made of the alleged origins (incorrect, as it turns out) of the word 'landscape' in the use of the term *landschap* by Dutch painters of the 17th century to refer to their pictorial renderings of the scenery. It is no coincidence, moreover, that around the same time that social anthropologists began to toy with the idea of landscape, they also rediscovered an earlier preoccupation with the body. Thus instead of starting with *organisms in an environment*, as in mainstream ecological anthropology, they began to speak of *bodies in a landscape*. Did this change of keywords, I wondered, herald a decisive move from positive science to a more phenomenological approach to human environmental relations – to one that would take as its point of departure our own existential involvement in (rather than intellectual emancipation from) the world of which we speak? Or did it simply rearrange the terms of inquiry without significantly altering the ontological frame into which they were inserted? More often than not in our disciplines, conceptual substitutions that appear to indicate paradigm shifts in our thinking turn out to hide underlying continuities. The rediscovery of the 'body', it seemed, offered a case in point.

Classical social anthropology, in the tradition of Emile Durkheim and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, used to draw an absolute distinction between the individual organism, as a concrete entity with a certain physiological and psychological constitution, and the social person as a particular position in a network of social relationships (the *locus classicus* for this distinction is Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 193–4). The organism was the answer to the question 'What are you?' (answer: a human being, subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens*); the person was the answer to the question 'Who are you?' – one that could be answered only by giving an outline of your life history, including where you have come from and where you have been, your kinship connections, the work you do, and so on. The body was not much mentioned, but when it was – as for example in the writings of Mary Douglas (see, especially, Douglas 1970) – it appeared to be the same thing as the organism, though considered less from the point of view of its physiological functioning than from that of its use as an expressive instrument of social communication, or as a resource for metaphorical elaboration, pressed into service as a bearer of extra-somatic, symbolic meanings. Realising however that persons can exist and make their presence felt in the social world only in so far as that presence is embodied, a number of anthropologists – Michael Jackson (1983) and Thomas Csordas (1990) prominent among them – began to take the line that the body is no natural, biological object but rather the active *subject* of social relations. When

I ask who you are, your body responds as much as you do, and when you tell your life story, it is equally your body's story, since it is the body that speaks, lives, grows and ages in the company of others. You as a person and your body, claim advocates of the 'paradigm of embodiment', are one and the same. And with that, they assure us, the dualism of mind and body, that has bedevilled the last three or four centuries of western thought, is finally laid to rest.

But what, you might ask, has happened to the organism? It is apparently still there, but only as a residual, purely material entity. The 'mere' organism that had once subsumed the person now reappears as the underbelly of the body. You may be the same as your body, but beneath the body-that-you-are is a thing of flesh and blood, exercising certain basic respiratory and metabolic functions. Thus the ancient division of the human being into two parts or aspects, the social subject (person) and biological object (organism), remains as firm as ever. All that has occurred is that the body has shifted across from one side to the other. Where before it was aligned with the organism, vis-à-vis the person, it is now aligned with the person, vis-à-vis the organism. Indeed, far from softening the subject-object division, the paradigm of embodiment seems only to have reinforced it: the embodiment of the person has entailed nothing less than the disembodiment of the organism! Thus reduced to a protoplasmic mass of biological potential, the organism cannot be conceived to interact, in any sensible way, with its environment. Ecology, the study of relations between organisms and their environments, is robbed of its subject matter (see Ingold 2000b, 214–6). Not only did the realignment of the body 'mere' the organism, however; for by the same token, the revaluation of the landscape in which bodies were supposed to place themselves did the same for the environment. Where once the landscape had been imagined, like the body, as material for the expression of symbolic meanings or as a substrate for the inscription of social form, it now became an intersubjectively constituted, existential domain in which body-persons place themselves in relation to one another. Just as 'body' lent presence or comportment to the otherwise ethereal person, so 'landscape' gave material substance to what until then had been known more abstractly as 'space'. Meanwhile the environment, along with the organism, was left on the other side, reduced to the subterranean bedrock of raw physicality.

IV

Now my own thinking, as I have already indicated, was moving in precisely the opposite direction, namely towards rescuing the organism from the ignominy of 'mereness' into which it had been cast by the anthropocentric conceits of humanism, and concomitantly towards reanimating the environment as the space of human dwelling. Thus body and landscape, far from driving a wedge between organism and person on the one hand, and environment and space on the other, were for me ways to bring them together again; terms of unification rather than division. But

here we come to the crux of the matter: this unification could only be achieved by thinking of both body and landscape as essentially temporal phenomena. Neither the body nor the landscape comes in a fixed or final form, which has only to be inscribed on a formless substrate of biological and geological ‘raw material’. Both, rather, are perpetually under construction. On the side of the body, this constructive process is conventionally known as ontogenesis: literally the continual birth of being. Embodiment and ontogenesis, then, are not opposed terms, as though one referred to the growth of the organism in nature and the other to its moulding into a socially prescribed form. They are both words for the same thing, or rather the same process, namely the development and maturation of the organism–body–person in its environment. This process is incorporative, not inscriptive; its forms ever-emergent, not preordained. Look at the human figures in Bruegel’s paintings, whether *The Harvesters* or *The Battle Between Carnival and Lent*, and you can see this process going on. Here are people who, through their production and consumption, labour and pastimes, movement and rest, are growing and sustaining themselves and one another. ‘Form is the end, death’, insisted the artist Paul Klee in his notebooks, ‘form-giving is movement, action. Form-giving is life’ (Klee 1973, 269). What Bruegel has given us, in these paintings, is life.

On the side of the landscape, too, life is going on. It too waxes and wanes, heaves and subsides, with the days, seasons, years and millennia. And human organism–persons, in their bodily presence and activity, are as much a part of it as are birds, trees, crops and hills. Life is not something we choose to do but what we necessarily undergo, and to understand human doings as tasks is to frame them within these vital undergoings. Thus a task is not something you do completely of your own free will, as if you had alighted upon the world from some place beyond and owed nothing to it for your existence. It is rather what *falls* to you to do, an act to which you submit as in indeed you must submit to the world in whose form-giving processes you partake, and from which you draw your very being. As denizens of the world, our tasking is part and parcel of the world’s worlding. That is why, in the final analysis, taskscape and landscape are one. As I wrote in what I take to be the most important passage in ToL:

‘By re-placing the tasks of human dwelling in their proper context within the process of becoming of the world as a whole, we can do away with the dichotomy between taskscape and landscape – only however by recognising the fundamental temporality of the landscape itself.’ (Ingold 1993, 164; 2000a, 201)

I had introduced the concept of ‘taskscape’, in short, only to show why in the end, we do not need it. Landscape will do, so long as we bring it back to life and cease to regard it as stage and scenery for the enactment of human affairs.

In fact, long after ToL was published and largely thanks to the interventions of the historical geographer Kenneth Olwig, I realised that this revitalised and temporal sense of landscape which I was struggling to express actually comes close to the original,

pre-modern meaning of the term. I have already noted, in passing, that the common identification of 'landscape' with the scopic regime of modernity is mistaken. Far from originating with practices of scenic projection, in which landscape is a tableau to be looked at, the word is of much older provenance, having its roots in the agrarian practices of northern Europe in early medieval times (Olwig 2008). The suffix 'scape' does not come, as so many scholars have supposed, from the classical Greek *skopein*, meaning 'to look', but from Old English *sceppan* or *skyppan*, meaning 'to shape'. Thus landscape is not land looked at but *land shaped*. Medieval farmers and woodsmen shaped the land not by projects of design, as in the modern practice of landscape architecture, but by working it on foot, with axe and plough, and assisted by their domestic animals. This was work done close up, in an immediate, muscular and visceral engagement with wood, grass and soil – the very opposite of the distanced, contemplative and panoramic optic that the word 'landscape' conjures up in many minds today (Ingold 2012, 198). In this medieval sense, landscape already couples the land with the tasks of shaping: landscape is taskscape because to shape the land is to work it. In his painting of *The Harvesters*, executed on the cusp of the transition from medieval to modern sensibilities, Bruegel has given us a superb evocation of what it means for land to be thus entasked.

V

However there is something else in the picture, which I had missed. Right in the centre, in the foreground, stretched out at the foot of the old pear tree, a labourer lies fast asleep. In ToL, I had made only passing reference to this man. I imagined him snoring heavily, and that the rhythm of his snores would have jarred with everything else in the surroundings. The sleeper, then, was for me the exception that proved the rule, namely that rhythmic resonance calls for wakeful attention (see Ingold 1993, 170–1; 2000a, 207). But then, why should Bruegel have chosen to place this figure in such a prominent position? And why, despite this, did I fail to give it the attention it deserved? I now see that my preoccupation with the taskscape had caused me to conjure a world of unceasing movement and activity, and had blinded me to the imperative of rest and repose even when it was staring me in the face. In the taskscape, bodies appear to be chronically busy, perpetually in motion. Yet in life, there can be no activity without rest, and the latter deserves our attention just as much as the former. Is not sleep as crucial as wakeful activity to being and staying alive? Indeed as the geographer Paul Harrison has rightly pointed out, despite my efforts to restore the landscape to time, there is ultimately something *timeless* about my account of *The Harvesters* in ToL (Harrison 2009, 1003). A flow that allows no cessation, practice without respite, cannot give rise to time. For time to appear, practice must gain a foothold, and this calls for friction as well as flow. For things to pour forth into their surroundings, they must also periodically withdraw into themselves. The world, in a sense, must be allowed to breathe. And this leads

to another concern with which I have been somewhat preoccupied in recent years. It is about lines and the weather.

I have begun to think that every task describes a linear movement of some kind. The line may be roughly straight, such as a path cut through the cornfield, or elegantly curved, like the swish of a scythe. Together, these lines weave what I have called a *meshwork* (Ingold 2011, 63–97). Woven into the land rather than written on it, the lines of the meshwork are as intrinsic to its constitution as are threads to the constitution of cloth. Of course these lines are not only woven by human beings, for they also tangle with the lines of both non-human animals, such as birds in flight or the lumbering ox, and of plants such as tree-roots and corn-stalks. All play their part in shaping the land, in the sense outlined above. In my thinking, then, the array of tasks has largely come to be replaced by this medley of lines; taskscape by meshwork. But I have also felt increasingly uneasy about the concept of landscape. It seems to place the surfaces of the world ahead of the meeting of earth and sky wherein these surfaces are forever being formed or dissolved (see Ingold 2008, and my essay ‘Landscape or weather-world?’ in Ingold 2011, 126–35). ‘Even the sedentary peasant’, write philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, ‘participates fully in the space of the wind, the space of tactile and sonorous qualities’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 531). As the peasant works the earth, he also labours beneath the great dome of the sky, and is subject to the mixing and folding of the soil below and the vicissitudes of wind and weather above. Indeed the very ground he treads is formed of the interpenetration of these elemental domains, where earth and sky meet and mingle in the ongoing genesis of sentient life.

Thus Bruegel’s harvesters, it now seems to me, are the inhabitants not so much of a landscape as of an *earth-sky world*. Instead of landscape and taskscape, then, we have the earth-sky and the meshwork. Whereas the meshwork is made up of lines, the earth-sky is the domain of weather. So the question for me, now, is: what is the relation between them, between meshwork and earth-sky, between lines and the weather? For while every living being stitches itself into the world along the ever-unspooling lines of the meshwork; it is also necessarily immersed in an atmosphere or weather-world. The being is in a world, to be sure, but is this world to be understood as meshwork or atmosphere? My tentative answer is that it is alternately both. As with breathing in and breathing out, inhalation and exhalation, we take in the world of earth and sky as we breathe the air and soak up its moisture, and on the outward breath we propel ourselves along our lines of growth and movement, weaving the very textures of the land as we go along. All other terrestrial creatures do the same, though in their very different ways. In short the living, respiring being is the site where atmospheric immersion is transformed into the extension of the meshwork along its ever proliferating lines. It is where the weather is turned into the furrows of the ploughman, where sunlight is turned into growing crops and wind into the harvesters’ sheaves. This alternation, fundamental to all life, is what gives to time (I have developed this argument, most recently, in Ingold 2015, 84–8).

VI

Following its birth and upbringing in ToL, ‘taskscape’ seems to have gone out into the world and enjoyed a life of its own. I have not, like an anxious parent, kept a close eye on its fortunes since it left home, though a recent search on the internet turned up a media production company called ‘Taskscape Associates Limited’, registered in Carlisle, and a Wikipedia entry which graciously acknowledges that ‘the term *taskscape* is often credited to social anthropologist Tim Ingold’. To be entirely candid, *taskscape* is a neologism I have never much cared for, and since ToL was published I have only rarely had resort to it. Not only is the word awkward to pronounce; it also seems to capitulate to the fashionable habit of turning anything and everything into a ‘scape’ of some kind: thus contemporary literature is awash with *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, even *relationscapes* (see, for example, Appadurai 1996 and Manning 2009). One consequence of this multiplication of scapes has been to dilute the concept of landscape to the point where much of its meaning has ebbed away, and I regret having contributed to this by adding yet another incongruous compound to the list. Indeed, that ‘taskscape’ has had such a prolonged afterlife despite my attempts to kill it off at source by demonstrating its redundancy, has for me been a source of some astonishment. Perhaps this is what happens when a concept first introduced to do a specific job of work in the development of an argument breaks loose from its original discursive moorings and sets up on its own. All too easily, it can assimilate to the very assumptions it was brought in to dislodge.

With *taskscape*, these are the assumptions that lead us to project human social activities against a backdrop of nature. For those who think like that, *taskscape* can be a handy moniker for a descriptive account of the spatiotemporal layout of activity at a site, which is exactly how I had used it myself when, in those lectures in Manchester, I had first introduced the term. I suspect it is how it is still being used today in archaeology and (to a much lesser extent) in anthropology. We should never forget, however, that human beings, like organisms of all sorts, belong to the land: they are formed of its flesh and participate in its processes. *Taskscape* is no more and no less than landscape brought back to life. ‘Wherever anything lives’, wrote the philosopher Henri Bergson, ‘there is open, somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed’ (Bergson 1911, 17). What should we call that register? Landscape? *Taskscape*? Either will do, though with its rich historical resonances, landscape means more to me. What we do not need, though, is both. For when all is said and done, there are not two registers for the inscription of time, but only one.

Notes

1. I first set out this position in my Royal Anthropological Institute Curl Lecture, presented in 1989. There, I argued that: ‘the process of becoming a person is integral to the process of becoming an organism; more specifically it is that part of the process that has to do with the development of consciousness. The human being, then, is not two things but one; not an individual and a

person, but, quite simply, an organism' (Ingold 1990, 220). For more on how I arrived at this view, see Ingold (2000a, 3, 172–3).

2. The original essay was reproduced, with minor revisions, as Chapter 11 of *The Perception of the Environment* (Ingold 2000a, 189–208).
3. Having completed a first draft of ToL, I sent a copy to Marcia Pointon, then Professor of the History of Art at the University of Manchester, to ask for her opinion. She was characteristically scathing. The job of the historian, she said, is to analyse the painting, and to put the work and its creator into the context of their time. It is not to pretend that you are inside the painting, along with what it depicts! I responded that fortunately, as an anthropologist rather than a historian, I can get away with such things.

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