

work on the material propensity of plastic is not to repudiate a concern with the quality of stone. On the contrary, I believe that what we have done is to try and absorb the sensitivity to the flow of material qualities that Ingold addresses with respect to stone, and insist, contrary to most others, that this also needs to be applied to the way people come to understand, appreciate and work with plastic.

Ingold wants us to contemplate the stone in its environment, but he seems to want this to be a natural, not a human, environment. Another paper in the materiality volume, by Engelke (2005), rests largely on the way an apostolic group in Zimbabwe understand the material propensities of honey as against pebbles from a stream. So it is not that I would not want to respect Ingold's ideals. I do not want us to lose touch either with the contemplation of the natural or with the immediacy of our encounters with the world. There is a sense of beauty that Ingold touches upon that I have no desire to detract from. But, for all that, our profession demands an encounter with the world as we find it. My heart is in contemporary ethnography, and I do not feel the need to apologize for a material culture that has changed in recent decades largely because today it is, while a few decades ago it manifestly was not, central to this contemporary ethnography. In the end I guess I just do not understand why Ingold seems to want to privilege a stone in his eloquent discussion of the nature of material over a mobile phone and plastic. Because doing so threatens to disenfranchise most of the peoples of the contemporary world and their experiences, and I would wish to see them as just as authentic and potentially just as profound as any historical encounters of people with materials.

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**An archaeology of material stories. Dioramas as illustration and the desire of a thingless archaeology** *Björn Nilsson*

No matter what kind of archaeologist you think you are, Ingold's text evokes emotional and intellectual reactions concerning a core of archaeology: how to deal scientifically with the material world. It pinpoints some serious problems within today's archaeology, not least field archaeology. Given this, I will try to comment on Ingold's text from a practical archaeological point of view. Before I turn to the tangible fields of sand, clay, stone fragments and almost vanished materials, I will take the opportunity to associate Ingold's point of view with a well-known geographical tradition, since some concepts appear to be quite similar.

As a doctoral student at the University of Lund I had a room with a nice view. Twice, maybe three times, I recognized the geographer Torsten Hägerstrand passing by on his bike beneath my window. From his writings one could draw the conclusion that the bicycle played an important role in his life as geographer. Hägerstrand was often pictured with his bike. For him the

two-wheeled vehicle served as a means to come closer to the reality of space. As with his time geography, the bike was a statement of a life philosophy that studied, stressed and acknowledged the human rights to plan, decide and follow one's own paths in the world. At the beginning of his academic career he had an interest in population geography and migrations. He studied the Swedish emigration to America from a local perspective. He and his wife spent several summers in the church archives of a certain parish in the centre of Sweden, where they tried to follow the biographies of all individuals during a hundred years. The involvement with this project made Hägerstrand change his geographical perspective. He got to know the past places and people of the study area in such detail that he developed a contextual and biographical approach to geography. Accordingly Hägerstrand became attracted to the concept of the *diorama* (Sollbe 1991, 217–19). Dioramas, which had become fashionable by the end of the 19th century, functioned as a kind of display, frequently of zoological sceneries which pictured animals in their proper natural context – often a bit dramatic. Even cultural-historical phenomena were pedagogically explained through the medium of the diorama: at open-air museums one could, and still can, visit frozen scenes of the local blacksmith, the school, the village general store and so on. Later, however, cultural historians judged the diorama an unscientific form of display. They detached the blacksmith's tools from their original context and placed them on the museum's walls, in 'correct' order.

Hägerstrand's geographical dioramas – no matter what the scale – could be seen as a snapshot of a world in full motion with ever-changing relations of material positions. Thus Hägerstrand's world is seen as 'things beyond things' and 'events beyond events' (Hägerstrand 1991, 134–35). Hägerstrand concentrated on the contacts between matter – living as well as dead – and described it as a world of *granular structure*, where the grains (be they a human, a piece of rock, a chair or a cloud) attract and influence each other. The spatio-temporal life paths of a particular grain are delimited but also reinforced by other grains in the world. The grains are under the constant influence of their environment. Additionally, grains mix with or attach to one another, and create more complex levels of grains – with different abilities and conditions to endure and last in the world. Grains form populations that are ordered in different manners; sometimes grains are so densely packed that one could no longer speak of single grains. Therefore Hägerstrand completed his granular theory with two specific principles of grain-packing: *substrates* and *media*. The latter ideas were taken, and developed, from the well-known Finnish geographer Johannes Gabriel Granö, whose writings had a great influence on Hägerstrand. Granö published his theories in the dissertation *Reine Geographie* in the late 1920s (Granö 1929). Eventually, in 1997, the book was translated into English, entitled *Pure geography* (Granö 1997). It is fascinating reading, and bearing Granö's scientific context in mind, some of his geographical intentions were a good 50 years ahead of their times. Quite pioneering, and as a methodological phenomenologist, Granö explored a human-centred landscape. In order to map profoundly the perceived landscape, he focused on proximities. Proximity, he argued, 'is that part of the environment that is perceivable with all the senses and is situated

between the observer and the landscape' (Granö 1997, 108). Granö divided proximities into three main parts (ibid.):

1. *Proximate field of vision* – the complex of visible phenomena and objects in the proximity.
2. *Medium* – the tactile, auditory and olfactory phenomena of the surrounding or adjacent elements.
3. *Substrate* – tactile phenomena on the ground.

Proximities, Granö suggested, are to be studied by a branch of geography designated *proximics*. Proximics examines the human space where landscape turns into materials and things, and where our material life is as engaging and intimate as it gets. It might be possible that a revitalized and updated proximics, together with Hägerstrand's dioramic and granular material perspective, would add methodological and thus empirical fuel to the Gibsonian approach Ingold searches for. I am not sure. At least it might simplify archaeological application (Nilsson 2003, 85–89).

Some archaeologists never remove the soil beneath their nails, and they cover their desktops with artefacts. As with the geographer's bicycle, their statement is clear: archaeology is physical, material and for real. Fair enough. From a material-culture studies perspective, Ingold demonstrates that there is a division between theories of the materiality of objects, and theories of the properties of materials. However, a great problem for archaeology is its obsession with things. The stones on the desk are neither material objects nor objects of materiality. They are archaeological artefacts. Not even things from the past. For many archaeologists that is how it should be. Following the path of Ingold, one would soon find that archaeological artefacts are obstacles. I will try to express the dilemma from a prehistoric field-archaeological point of view. Such a departure makes everything more evident.

Being prejudiced, one could claim that while most academics have poor knowledge of – and interest in – how matters in the world really work, archaeologists are familiar with the material context of excavations. But material archaeological knowledge is based on the remains of material culture from the past, rather than on knowledge of vivid technologies in the present. From this starting point archaeology has produced its own material ordering and material ontology. Needless to say, the material system in archaeology is convenient, but still – it is a product of both wise and stupid archaeological tradition. One problem is that the archaeological material world is a world of hard, inorganic and durable materials such as stones, metals, burnt clay and so on. Since we know that soft materials play an outstanding role in arts and crafts, we completely lose certain material expressions. Every time we get a glimpse into the world of prehistoric objects of wood, antler, textiles and so on we are astonished. Ötzi, the Iceman, is a recent example. In order to follow Ingold, it is clear that field archaeology has to continue and advance postprocessual and contextual archaeology. To an extent this fits well with the aims of the so-called 'reflexive field archaeology' (cf. Berggren and Burström 2002). This means that we have to learn more about archaeology's internal material and technological hierarchies – before we can study past cultures' material stories, we have to know our own. In order to do this, this field

archaeology has to shift focus: from the artefactual–chronological to the more structural–material. A simple example: Swedish contract archaeology orders some hundred C14 analyses every year. For financial reasons the submitted organic materials are simply used for radiocarbon dating, but from a material point of view, information on the variety of tree species, connected to different use and technological contexts, might be more interesting than the chronological data. However, the determination of species is considered secondary information, and is rarely used. Many times I have heard myself complain about a lack of certain archaeological data. Often the only thing that is really lacking is scientific creativity. How, for example, are materials presented in field archaeological reports? Following an almost testamentary disposition, most excavation reports' find-lists lack any trace of past material biographical relations. On the top are hot and hard artefacts, in the middle is the usual stuff and far down are mass materials and scientific samples. Imagine a cookery book with no other information than a lists of ingredients, in alphabetical order or, even worse, in order of price per kilo at the local supermarket.

It is evident that archaeologists ought to be more imaginative and interested when it comes to material properties and their possible use and combination. As Ingold demonstrates, ordinary technological situations yield utterly complex material stories – the anthropologist's dream and the archaeologist's nightmare.

The perspective Ingold is advocating is challenging and doubtlessly could contribute to a revitalization of environmental and ecological archaeology. Elsewhere I have tried to locate some areas where archaeology could contribute to general environmental debate. One conclusion aligns well with Ingold's text, and contains a task I would dearly return to:

Long-term archaeology studies both past and current categorisations of physical materials. Historical research on the extraction, use, reuse, treatment, circulation, etc, of different categories of materials – from an ideological and society-based perspective – should provide a perspective on today's resource situation. Long-term histories of the use of, for example, lead, glacial boulder ridges, platinum, peat or copper sulphates, would result in varying and – I believe – quite special images of man's interaction with nature and material history. I believe that archaeology is one of few disciplines capable of conducting such a broad spatial, technological and temporal study (Nilsson 2003, 344).

In order to capture the long-term narratives of materials, archaeology might return to the human–material diorama – literally and metaphorically. The diorama forces us to think and act relationally, and to construct material contexts that consist of more than archaeological things connected to archaeological features.

More often, and especially since I started to work in contract archaeology, I have begun to see archaeological artefacts as hindrances, rather than interpretative vehicles. Perhaps it is like in music. Many expressive pieces have no words. While a wise material archaeology must perhaps discard things, in some sense, this does not imply that we have to clear our desks of stones.