

### Acknowledgements

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### Note

<sup>1</sup> I hasten to add that, of course, the greater part of archaeology is dedicated precisely to the study of materials and the ways they have been used in processes of production. Even in anthropology there is some ethnographic work on the subject. My point is simply that this work does not seem to impinge significantly on the literature on materiality and material culture. For scholars who have devoted much of their energies to the study of materials, this literature reads more like an escape route into theory – one which, I confess, I have previously used myself. Thus my argument is directed as much at myself as at anyone else, and is part of an attempt to overcome the division between theoretical and practical work.

<sup>2</sup> I do not pretend to offer a comprehensive critique of Hetherington's argument, which is mainly focused elsewhere. In any case I concur with much of it. I cite it here simply as an exemplary instance of the role that the concept of materiality plays in arguments of this kind.

<sup>3</sup> Though vague, this is about as close as I can get to a definition of what students of material culture, in the literature I have read, actually mean by materiality. For example, seeking reasons for the philosophical and scientific marginalization of 'the materiality of social life', Olsen asks why research has forgotten or ignored 'the physical and "thingly" component of our past and present' (2003, 87).

<sup>4</sup> I have found Gibson's tripartite scheme a useful starting point for thinking about the inhabited environment. But it is by no means without its problems, which I have begun to address elsewhere (Ingold 2005a; 2007).

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### Materiality in materials *Christopher Tilley*

I really welcome Tim Ingold's paper because intellectual debates about the meaning and significance of material culture or general attempts to theorize material forms are comparatively rare as opposed to the mass of literature discussing particular categories of things. In the paper he systematically sets out to oppose a concept of materiality (apparently worthless) to the study of materials which, in contrast, he suggests, may lead to many new insights

and understandings. I do not find this supposed opposition all that helpful. Indeed I believe that it may have a conservative and reactionary effect in relation to studies of material culture which is no doubt contrary to Ingold's intentions.

To start off this debate we need to recognize that each object has its own material properties but that these are processual and in flux, as Ingold demonstrates in relation to the wet stone slowly drying out and changing on his or my desktop. This will differ according to what kind of stone he and I have to hand; its shape, texture, colour and composition; whether the sunlight is shining on his desk or mine; the humidity of the air and so on. We are discussing and describing something highly specific, place-bound and variable. Now what might provide a link between what happens to Ingold's stone and what happens to mine? On what basis might we compare and contrast these stones? From an empiricist perspective we can objectively measure and weigh them and so on, consider their porosity and other attributes, thin-section them and determine their chemical composition, age, place of origin, and so on as a good geologist might do. But this does not help us very much in understanding their human significance without being put into a much broader social and historical context. This is precisely why we require a concept of materiality. To put it another way, there is on the one hand a processual world of stones which takes place oblivious to the actions, thoughts and social and political relations of humans. Here we are dealing with 'brute' materials and their properties. On the other hand there is the processual significance stones have in relation to persons and sociopolitical relations. The concept of materiality is required because it tries to consider and embrace subject-object relations going beyond the brute materiality of stones and considering why certain kinds of stone and their properties become important to people. The processes involved here are far more complex and require an altogether different kind of interpretative work than that which can be provided by empirical scientific studies of the type undertaken by geologists who are not usually concerned with what stones mean. All materials have their properties which may be described but only some of these materials and their properties are significant to people. The concept of materiality is one that needfully addresses the 'social lives' of stones in relation to the social lives of persons.

Let us imagine that the stone drying out on Tim Ingold's desk is a modern road stone that has fallen off the back of a lorry on the way to a construction project in Aberdeen. Blasted from a local quarry it was intended to form the foundation, together with tons of the same material, of a Tesco supermarket. This stone has no significance to anybody except to Ingold in the context of his personal experiment. He will throw it away as soon as it dries out. Let us further imagine that my stone, similarly drying out, is a piece of spotted dolerite. It is from an excavation trench at Stonehenge, a chipping from one of the bluestones transported there from the Prescelli mountains of south Wales over 4,000 years ago. I will not throw this stone away and its material properties will be of far greater interest to me than Ingold's road stone because I can reasonably assume that these properties of the stone would be of interest to prehistoric people. I would like to interpret what qualities of this stone made it of such significance that it was brought so

far: was it its hardness, colour, spottedness, precise point of origin in the mountains where it came from, perhaps high up from a jagged peak, and so on? In asking these questions I am concerned with the properties this stone has in relation to people. I am going beyond an empirical consideration of the stone to consider its meaning and significance. In doing so I move from a 'brute' consideration of material to its social significance. This to me is what is meant by the concept of materiality. To consider the materiality of stone (the title of my book, which Ingold objects to as somehow obfuscation) is to consider its social significance, the stone as meaningful, as implicated in social acts and events and the stories of people's lives, in both the past and the present. If Ingold's stone had been a granite chipping from a Scottish prehistoric stone circle then the contrast between the material properties of his stone and my stone would have been potentially very important indeed. In considering the *materiality* of this stone and in contrasting it with mine we would be comparing landscapes, contexts, movements, social and political strategies and the effects the different stones had on people, the manner in which they perceived and understood them. So the concept of materiality is all about going beyond the stone itself and situating it in relation to other stones, landscapes, persons and their doings – in other words developing a holistic and conceptual theoretical and interpretative framework.

Ingold refers positively to Henry Hodges's book *Artefacts*. This was almost certainly on my undergraduate reading list. No doubt a worthy book in many respects, it is the type of publication that made me seriously question why I had decided to study anthropology and archaeology. Its sheer tedium was that it considered artefacts from a purely technical point of view. People and the social significance of things were not really part of the agenda at all. Archaeology was revealed as a dry-as-dust empirical discipline incapable of embracing the social significance of things. This is because Hodges was dealing splendidly with materials but had no concept of materiality or a conceptual and theoretical framework capable of linking persons and societies to things. The categories of pots, bone, leather and so on he discusses are completely decontextualized from their social and historical contexts and thus no meaningful social interpretation of them can even be attempted. Everything is reduced to a technological process. The discipline has now changed radically precisely because of a move from considering materials and their properties to considering materiality, or what these properties mean in different social and historical contexts and how they are experienced. Hodges, as a typical empiricist, considers categories of material in isolation, listed by Ingold, 'hides and leather, pottery' and so on. But what have stone and pottery, for example, got in common and how do they contrast? This is not a question that Hodges would even address because these are artefacts of different kinds with different material properties. To ask questions about the meaning and significance of stone and pottery in relation to people requires a move from considerations of the materials in and for themselves to considerations of materiality, their meaning and significance, similarities and differences, places of origin, modes of manufacture, depositional contexts in relation to places, paths and landscapes. It is to set up an entirely new and post-empiricist

intellectual agenda. In archaeology this has become termed ‘postprocessual’ and (far better) interpretative archaeology in order to distinguish it from both traditional empiricist and positivist ‘processual’ conceptual approaches. So the concept of materiality has a dual significance. It signals both a disciplinary move away from empiricism and a new holistic concern with the understanding of the meaningful relationship between persons and things.

I agree with Ingold on many points made in his paper and it is perhaps worth listing some of these, as the differences between his position and mine may be more apparent than real. A great deal can, of course, be learnt from rowing a boat or chopping down a tree providing that we have a conceptual framework adequate to the job (for me a phenomenological perspective linked to a concept of materiality). Some recent writing on ‘materiality’ in the abstract does indeed lead us absolutely nowhere, but to suggest some kind of embargo on more abstract theoretical writings is not helpful at all. Here, for me, is a third significance of the concept of materiality. In employing this term I am not just trying to discuss materials and their processual properties but attempting to develop a general theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding these in relation to people and their worlds. I am attempting to engage with the manner in which the material properties of things profoundly affect human conduct, both enabling and empowering people’s lives and constraining them. The concept of things providing affordances to people is indeed very useful here, and a stress on the materiality of these affordances is important because it runs against the grain of the kind of idealism which would propose that people can think about or react to the material world in pretty much any way they like, which again Ingold rightly objects to. People are indeed embedded in a material world, immersed within it, and this sensuous world of material things has effects on the way people think and behave, but not in any simple or deterministic sense. Ingold stangely objects to the concept that things have agency in relation to people. If, as I do, we translate the term ‘agency’ as meaning providing affordances and constraints for thought and action, then I cannot understand why the term should trouble Ingold or anyone else.

There are two striking absences in Ingold’s paper. There is the virtual absence of discussion of people and the meaning and significance of materials made (artefacts) or encountered (unaltered materials). The problem with his one-sided stress on materials rather than materiality is that the meaning and significance and agency (effects) of things on people tends to become sidelined, and this consideration of the recursive relationship between people and things is why we need a concept of materiality rather than simply considering materials. Most of what Ingold writes about in his paper is for me embraced by the concept of materiality but I feel that he has ignored much that is important: the manner in which the experience of materials has profound effects on people’s lives and understanding of the worlds in which they live, and on their actions. We have long since, I hope, abandoned the old empiricist trap of considering materials in and for, and only in terms of, themselves, the spectre of which Ingold threatens to advocate once again.

So to write about materiality is (i) to attempt to develop a general theoretical and conceptual perspective or a theory of material culture in a material world; (ii) to consider the manner in which the materiality or properties of things, always in flux, are differentially experienced in different places and landscapes and social and historical contexts; (iii) to concern ourselves with the recursive relationship between people and things and the material world in which they are both embedded; and (iv) to address the affordances and constraints that things in relation to media such as the weather offer people and why some properties of things rather than others come to have significance in their lives. Ingold's consideration of materials thus forms an essential element in a much broader consideration of materiality in general.

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### **Materials *with* materiality?** *Carl Knappett*

Many scholars working in the domain of material culture will welcome this forceful statement from Ingold, sharing his frustration with the seemingly immaterial materiality emergent in the material-culture literature, the singular focus on things already made rather than their processes of becoming, and the apparent lack of contribution from those who do study materials in depth (e.g. archaeologists) to questions of materiality and material culture. His intervention is a timely one, although the message has been expressed before, albeit in more muted tones (e.g. Ingold 2000, 53). But while Ingold may be justified in bemoaning the lack of definition and clarity in 'materiality', is there scope for stepping back from the polemic and finding a middle ground? I would argue that materiality may still be a useful way of understanding the conjunction or intersection of the social and the material, without the former swallowing the latter.

#### **Latour vs. Lemonnier**

The debate over materiality that Ingold launches here is reminiscent of the argument between Latour and Lemonnier over the agency of human and gun (Latour 1996; Lemonnier 1996). Latour sees the well-worn debate between the pro-gun and anti-gun lobbies as a dead end: it is neither the gun that makes the human act (materialist explanation) nor the human that decides and then acts with the gun (sociological explanation). Instead, he argues, the two bring each other forth. The active agent is neither human nor gun, but human-with-gun, and any attempt at isolating either individual element is hopeless. This is, I would argue, the perspective endorsed in much of the current work on materiality. Artefacts may have material properties, but it makes little sense to study them in detail as they are secondary to the role of the artefact in social relations. Lemonnier, however, disagrees with Latour. Surely the gun has its own properties that can be assessed independently of the human, and