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Ways of living:
Tim Ingold on culture, biology and the anthropological task.

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SUMMARY:
Life is a university. Tim Ingold reminds us of something that we have often heard in bohemian circles. Life is fieldwork and fieldwork is life. Those who are familiar with Ingold's *oeuvre* will not be surprised by this statement; for those who are not, here is an extraordinary opportunity to step into it. In this conversation, Ingold makes an overview of some of his central ideas about what makes us human, but he is also invited to critically reflect on questions of anthropological method and theory, as well as on the role of our discipline in the big contemporary debates. Along with Ingold, we welcome here an anthropology that thinks of (and not only shows) diverse ways of living.

KEY WORDS:
Tim Ingold, culture, biology, anthropology, perception, learning.

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Luis Fernando Angosto Ferrández [LFAF]: I would like to start this interview by tackling methodological issues, particularly in relation to the reasons why, in your view, 'anthropology is not ethnography'[1]. You have made a very clear distinction between these two concepts and these two tasks that are anthropology and ethnography, and you remark that ethnography is not a means to anthropology, but an end in itself. Against the background of this distinction and the way in which you approach anthropology, initially I wanted to ask what motivated you to write about this issue at this particular stage in your career. Could we read it as a concern with revitalising anthropology to tackle big contemporary debates, which seems to be one general goal embedded in your work?

Tim Ingold [TI]: Yes. I've been worried about the extent to which anthropology has been marginalised in public discussions about the future of global humanity; what to do with the environment, how to organise society, and so on. I feel that one reason why anthropology has been rather marginalised (compared with other disciplines) in big debates around what we should make of ourselves in the world, and what it means to be human in the kind of world that we live in now, is that anthropology has retreated into what is basically an ethnographic kind of inquiry. I see that as a kind of contraction. So in that lecture I argued that anthropology, on the one hand, is an open-ended, generous, comparative, but critical inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life in the word, the one world that we all inhabit – not many worlds, but one world. Conditions and potentials are important. I see this as having a very important speculative element; to be thinking about not just how life is lived, or has been lived, among this or that group of people, but what the possibilities of living life are, in a much more general, speculative way. Ethnography, on the other hand, is defined as a descriptive exercise of giving an honest, nuanced, well-informed, sensitive account of how life is lived among this or that people, at some particular time. It might be the present, or, if it's ethno-history, it might be at some time in the past. But the objective of ethnography is fundamentally descriptive or documentary, whereas I believe the objective of anthropology should be transformational. And in that sense anthropology is, or should be, a forward looking discipline, thinking about the possibilities: what could we be as humans in the world, and what could the world be for us? That to me is anthropology's mission. Whereas ethnography, which is just as important – we couldn't do

1. Tim Ingold presented in 2007 the Radcliffe-Brown Lecture in Social Anthropology at the British Academy with the title 'Anthropology is not Ethnography'.

without it – has a different objective, and that is to describe. It is graphic, just as a historiography describes historical forms of life…

LFAF: So you distinguish ethnography as a form in itself, not as a means to anthropology.

TI: It is not a means to an end. I'm very much against the idea that we collect lots of ethnographies here and there, and then compare them and come up with some generalisations, and that this is anthropology.

LFAF: In a Radcliffe-Brownian way, so to speak.

TI: It's the way Radcliffe-Brown initially presented it. And even today, I think many anthropologists remain unsure what more there is to anthropology than ethnography. They put together edited volumes of case studies from here and there, and try to come up with some sorts of generalisations. But that is not what it's about.

LFAF: For some colleagues, bringing anthropology forward into the important debates of our time requires a return to that Radcliffe-Brownian idea of doing more armchair anthropology in order to reach valid generalisations. But you contend that this is not what anthropology is about, because if we do anthropology, we do it in the world and with people. And that relates to the way we are educated, as you put it; not only taught to do something, but taught how to perceive our environment, the environment in which we act. Can you elaborate on that?

TI: Yes. Because I think we should treat the world as a university. When we go to university, we study with scholars, teachers, and we expect to learn from them: not in order that we would then go on to represent what they said. We don't study with a scholar so that then we can spend the rest of our time, our lives, explaining what that scholar said. We study with a scholar, we go to university, in order that our powers of observation, perception, analysis, reason can be enhanced, so that we are better equipped to cope with whatever challenges we might face up ahead. And my view is that we should treat the whole world as a university. When we go to do fieldwork or when we do participant observation, that is itself a form of learning – listening to what the world is telling you, and learning from it. But that's not the same thing as gathering data from it, in order that it may then be represented later on.

LFAF: In this context you have made the point, which to me is central for understanding what anthropologists do, that we shouldn't be demarcating a clear boundary between fieldwork and non-fieldwork life.

TI: Absolutely not.

LFAF: You suggest that our life experiences have to do with this process of learning the world, right?

TI: Yes. Life is fieldwork and fieldwork is life. I don't think that, as we study, we should be partitioning off the field, as the place where we collect the materials, from university, or wherever, where we analyse and present it. It doesn't matter where we are! And you don't have to go anywhere to do anthropology because, wherever you are, the world is around you. So the point about fieldwork is simply that it enables us to bring more people into the conversation, to draw on a wider range of wisdom and knowledge, than if we only talked amongst ourselves.

LFAF: Still around these issues of methodology and what anthropologists do, I wanted to hear about what drives you to draw certain analogies in your writings. Some of them are inspiringly picturesque. You have on occasion referred to the analogy between the artist and the anthropologist. For instance, the figure of the painter comes to mind, the painter approaching a landscape. On the one hand, he has to approach the landscape from a particular perspective; and that perspective would vary depending on the point where he locates himself. But, in addition, when the painter is capturing reality he has a way of capturing a snapshot of the landscape in time. You have argued that anthropologists do that whenever they do ethnography: it's a sort of snapshot in time, but one that we should not see as isolated from a past that somehow has brought it to being or from a future that is contained within that moment. Given this understanding of anthropology, do you think we should be more daring? Do you think anthropology can be a science of prognosis, or at least that we could be more adventurous in that regard?

TI: We can certainly be more adventurous, but I'm not sure whether our job is to predict. I want to distinguish between prediction and anticipation, or between prediction and foresight. Prediction is the sort of thing that economists do, when they are required to come up with scenarios. Or, say, if you're working on climate change and you say "if this measure is adopted, then our scenario is that the world will have warmed up so

much in fifty years' time. Or if that policy is adopted, then by so much." That's not what anthropology is supposed to do. It's not in the business of delineating alternative scenarios of what the world might be like in twenty or fifty or a hundred years' time. But I think it is in the business of looking ahead, of thinking about the ways in which things are going, and of following them through. And in that respect what anthropologists do is very similar, I think, to what artists are doing, and architects too – that is, it's a question not of prediction but foresight, of thinking into the future, not trying to predict or control it. So it's a forward-looking discipline, not a retrospective one where you're simply drawing a line from the present and saying "right, now we're just going to look at everything from here."

LFAF: But then, if not in prognosis, can this forward-look result in showing or opening up other possibilities?

TI: Yes, which is exactly what art is doing, and that's why I think there is such a close connection between art and anthropology. One of the roles of the contemporary artist is to open up and show to viewers possibilities of being that they might not otherwise have been aware of. I think that's something anthropology is also very well equipped to do.

LFAF: While detaching yourself from some of Radcliffe-Brown's proposals, you have also acknowledged that you've found inspiration in his work, particularly around his idea of the philosophy of process, something that anthropology should recover, in your view. You have argued very emphatically about the need to leave aside preconceptions of society as an entity, which stop us from understanding what life is. Life in your view is process and development. Indeed you have argued that when looking at organic life itself, rather than using the supra-organic metaphor, we could think of changeable forms and processes in which human life takes part. If we were to evaluate both the epistemological and the broad social implications of this proposal, how would you present the advantages to be enjoyed? What can anthropologists, and scientists in general, obtain from these philosophical premises? What's the advantage of approaching life in these terms as opposed to approaching it terms of societies and cultures as isolated entities for analysis?

TI: It's quite a philosophical question. You could proceed in two ways. You could either say that you start with forms and structures and then understand processes and the ways those forms and structures write

themselves out in life. Or you could start with processes, and see how forms and structures arise or are generated within those processes. It's a question of which comes first. To my mind, forms and structures do not appear out of nowhere; they have to grow, they have to develop somehow or other. And this is also true in life: if you take organisms, organisms grow, they develop. Their forms are not given in advance; they arise out of a developmental process. It seems to me that this developmental process, or what biologists call ontogenesis, is crucial to life. To argue that forms precede the processes that give rise to them is inherently circular. This circularity is built into the structure of neo-Darwinian theory in biology. To my mind, it vitiates the theory. But it's also built into a lot of classical social anthropology, which starts from the structure, and then generates the processes from the structure. Where did you get the structure from, if not from the processes? So my view is simply that you can't have forms or structures of any kind without the processes that give rise to them, and therefore that processes come first. This is no different from what Karl Marx said when he insisted that production comes before consumption. You can't have objects or commodities to consume, unless there is a process of making them in the first place.

LFAF: Moving on to another methodological issue: you have clearly remarked that the key distinction between what anthropologists do and what other social scientists do is that we work in the world, and that we work with. But do you think that we can still claim exclusivity to this method, when other social scientists are more and more resorting to this idea of doing ethnography?

TI: Well, what we do is participant observation, and I think that's good and we should be proud of it, because participant observation means that we're observing – we're knowing – from the inside. We are developing our knowledge; we are observing through working with, through participating with, whatever forms it might be. I don't think we should confuse participant observation with ethnography. They're usually taken to mean the same thing, but I think they are quite different. What the other social sciences, sociology and so forth, have taken on board is ethnography. They tend to see ethnography simply as a data gathering exercise. You go out, you interview people and you make some observations, and when you've collected your ethnographic data, you bring it home, and then you analyse it. The whole point about participant observation, for me, is that it's absolutely not a data gathering exercise. It's a way of learning from the inside, and that's quite different. In fact the ontological commitment

on which participant observation rests, namely that we owe something of our very being and of our knowledge to the world in which we find ourselves, makes the idea of data gathering unthinkable. So for me there is a very clear distinction between participant observation and ethnography as a research method or tool. The kind of ethnography that the other data-collecting social sciences are taking on is rather positivistic. It's participant observation that we in anthropology need to hold onto; that's really what we do.

LFAF: Do you think this is reflected in many anthropology teaching programs? Is there a clear enough emphasis on that distinction at the moment in our schools?

TI: No. I think there's a great deal of muddle, confusion and ambivalence. It's very common to hear anthropologists – my own colleagues – moaning about the way in which ethnography has been taken over and misused, and abused, by other disciplines. "It's not what we mean", they say; "our method has been taken away from us!" And so they worry about it, but at the same time they will talk about ethnography as a research tool, or as a trick of the trade. I think people are deeply confused about the relationship between ethnography, participant observation and anthropology, and we need to talk it out. But having said that, whenever I try to explain the issue about ethnography and anthropology to my colleagues, they get very upset and annoyed, and say that everything I've said about anthropology is what they are calling ethnography.

LFAF: It is very stimulating that theorists like you make this effort of clarification at this stage in your career. In my view, it is healthy for the discipline. On one hand, there's been a sceptical view coming from within anthropology about its potential as a discipline. But, on the other hand, whenever you see how powerful and engaging is the work of some anthropologists is, how it stimulates new ways of thinking about the world, you realise that what we do cannot really be done by anybody else.

TI: Absolutely not, no. We do need anthropology. And my real concern is that in the big debates, the big public debates about what the future of humanity is going to be, anthropology is not there. They're only called in when somebody thinks they might have some curious ethnography…

LFAF: Some exotic point.

TI: Yes

LFAF: By the way, someone else who has repeatedly addressed these issues is Thomas Eriksen. Indeed he dedicated his book Engaging Anthropology to a discussion of them. I interviewed him in September 2012 and asked him about the reasons why anthropologists are relatively popular in Norway and are contacted by the media whenever there was something calling for informed debate. He responded that while it is difficult to pinpoint a single reason, the fact that, in his heyday, Fredrik Barth had an important public impact, needed to be taken into account. That left an impression.

TI: Fred Barth was a very charismatic public intellectual; he spoke and everyone listened. And so he established in Norway the idea of anthropology as a discipline that really has a public contribution to make. And Thomas Eriksen is riding the press in that way. I don't think he would be able to do what he is doing now if Fredrik had not done that.

LFAF: But there are other contextual influences to be taken into account. The times are different in many respects. When engaging in public debate, new difficulties and hostilities are arising. It seems that you have experienced them on occasion, when trying to talk to people in other disciplines. You have spoken of the reluctance displayed by colleagues in other areas to engage in open discussion in the search for interdisciplinary understanding. It was interesting to read in your work of how you identify around the mid-20th century a sort of schism in the academia, when scholars in certain sciences, but particularly in the field of biology and among those working within the neo-Darwinist paradigm, began to withdraw altogether from interdisciplinary discussion. You noted how in an earlier era, very prominent figures would address each other with respect, both in anthropology and in biology, among other fields. What happened that things shifted so noticeably? Is there in your view any particular political ingredient or contextual force that can help explain this abrupt and bitter divorce?

TI: It's very distressing the way neo-Darwinists have formed a sect and will only engage with anyone else on their terms. I have just finished editing a book with a colleague (Gisli Palsson) called Biosocial Becomings, trying to take a completely new approach to understanding the relationship between the biological and the social, thinking of human life as a process of becoming, and focusing on ontogenetic and developmental processes as well as social processes. The first three words of my intro-

duction to that book are "Neo-Darwinism is dead." As a paradigm I think it is completely exposed as circular, contradictory, and simply not in accord with what we know about biological organisms, let alone human beings. The interesting thing is that there are now substantial numbers of researchers even within the biological sciences who are calling for a radically new approach. I have read article after article in which people working in epigenetics, developmental systems theory and even in evolutionary theory are saying that with what we know now about organisms, the neo-Darwinian paradigm simply doesn't work. So there's a huge paradigm shift going on in biology just now, and the interesting thing is that this paradigm shift brings us right into line with the most contemporary developments in social anthropology, with the kind of relational and processual thinking going on there too. So the conditions for reuniting biological and social anthropology are better than they've ever been. But this reunification can only happen if we consign neo-Darwinism to the dustbin. Nevertheless, neo-Darwinists still have tremendous public and political support.

LFAF: And economic support as well.

TI: Yes, the funding is massive. This enables them to maintain an extraordinary publicity campaign to make it appear as though what they're doing represents the cutting edge of science. Yet the reality, even within the natural sciences, not to mention the humanities, is that it is completely discredited.

LFAF: But at the same time it seems that this evolutionary reading of human life based on neo-Darwinism is at present the only source of new theories of culture. You have been discussing this elsewhere: they're still publishing in reputable scientific journals, claiming to have established a new theory of culture. So while taking your point that there might be a shift in the biological sciences that overcomes neo-Darwinist pitfalls, no-one is really coming forward to present an alternative, anthropologically grounded theory of culture.

TI: Yes. It's very difficult. For example, I recently put together a proposal for a conference to be held by the British Academy that would bring together all the different alternatives to neo-Darwinism from around the globe, in a number of different fields. I had a stellar cast of people, all internationally distinguished, who were happy to contribute. Yet the proposal

was rejected. I know why it was rejected: it was because neo-Darwinists are very powerful people who will not allow challenges to their system to be aired. They make absolutely sure that no alternatives are presented. In 2010, a high-profile event was convened called Culture Evolves, hosted jointly by the Royal Society and the British Academy, with a roster of big names. Yet not one single social or cultural anthropologist was even invited. Everybody there was presenting the neo-Darwinian gospel as the way to the future, yet their model of culture was based on premises that are simply false. It's very easy to show that they're false. Indeed they were presenting a theory of culture that reminds anthropologists of darker days that they would rather forget. It's pretty bad!

LFAF: Against this background, you, along with other colleagues, have been leading an effort to overcome these obstacles that currently separate the social and biological sciences. Do you think that there are any particular steps or threads that could be followed to overcome these kinds of obstacles? Should we anthropologists perhaps try to publish in other, non-exclusively anthropological journals? Should we be making more contacts beyond the discipline in order to show more effectively that there is not only a flaw in the scientific base of these paradigms, but also a misleading and potentially dangerous social premise behind them?

TI: Well, we do need to build alliances with people in the sciences. And the important thing to recognise is that there are probably more people working now within the biological sciences than people outside – that is, in the humanities – who are objecting to the dominant paradigm. We need to build alliances with them, and to make it absolutely clear that it is not that people in the social sciences and the humanities are once again refusing to have anything to do with science. It's not anti-science. It's not a question of "for and against science", it's a question of "for and against scientism", which is quite different.

LFAF: Indeed, your own work exemplifies that point. Even those who might disagree with some of your positions cannot criticise you for rejecting the value of biology or science in general. You continually draw from scientific knowledge produced in other disciplinary fields. However, you are also committed to defining biology in new terms, and you do so after criticising the way in which it is normally understood. You have identified, for instance, twenty different ways of approaching biology, and all of them, you contend, are missing an understanding of biology in a relational and developmental

way. I think that's an extraordinary point to make against those who look at social anthropology as a weak form of science. So could you please tell us more about your understanding of biology and about what you mean when you state that culture and biology are not to be separated?

TI: Biology, so far as I'm concerned, is simply the study of living organisms, or perhaps the study of life in a general kind of way. And that includes the study of any kind of organic process, from the way things operate within the cell nucleus, to the way in which metabolism and respiration and photosynthesis occur in relation to living organisms and their wider environment. One of the most striking things about 20th century biology was the way in which a strict separation was set up between evolutionary processes, and developmental or ontogenetic processes; between the processes of evolution and the processes of growth. And one of the most important things happening in contemporary biology at the moment is that – from many different directions, adopting different ideas and frameworks – scholars are all arguing that we need a different way of understanding the relationship between ontogenetic and evolutionary processes. There are a number of approaches, such as development systems theory, which are trying to think how developmental processes can be brought back into the centre of our understanding of life, instead of being treated as a sort of side effect or spinoff of the processes of evolution. To my mind, the most important thing that is happening in biology at the moment is the reincorporation of our understandings of ontogenetic development into the heart of biological theory. Once we can do that, the task of linking biology to social anthropology is made very, very much easier. It was only difficult because for so long biology meant evolutionary biology, which meant that if you were a social anthropologist and you wanted to link up with biology, then you had to be doing evolution, and doing evolution in a particular kind of way. But if we could say that to link up to biology means focusing on development, on how people grow up and acquire skills, and become knowledgeable and practised in the things they do, and on how doing so entails certain kinds of engagement with materials in the environment, then the connection would be obvious. For the results of these engagements are changes in the organism, which is growing and developing all the time. Once this is understood, the task of synthesis becomes really very easy. It's not a problem.

LFAF: Well, you present it in a simple and accessible way. But one realises, looking at your own work, how strong a theoretical effort is needed to reach that point. What is your view of the importance of theory in creating new frames of analysis and supporting new arguments?

TI: Besides the theoretical problems there are political ones as well. For example, it's easy for me to say that cultural differences are biological, because for example we acquire certain skills and they become part of the way our body works, and our body is a biological organism, and so forth. But if you simply say "cultural differences are biological" and feed that formula to a public that is used to understanding biological to mean hereditary and genetic, then of course it looks like racism. I think that for a long time, anthropologists were really scared about even touching the question of whether cultural differences could be biological. Because they knew that if they did so, there would be a danger of what they were saying being completely misinterpreted, as a resurgence of geneticism or even racism.

LFAF: By the way, you have also made an explicit effort to leave that type of threat aside. You have written about how race was replaced with culture as the concept by which anthropology explained social difference. But the underlying logic remained much the same: instead of being totally determined by biological equipment or genes, we started to conceptualise humans as beings who 'inherit' a culture and 'live it out', so to speak. That's not the way to go, in your view, is it?

TI: No, certainly not! But the trouble is that there is always this time lag, so you're talking to people, you're publishing, and the people reading your stuff are still thinking in another way. There's always a tendency for people to read things through the spectacles that they happen to be wearing, and it's making things very difficult.

LFAF: Do you think these difficulties could perhaps be softened by talking and writing in a way that can be more accessible to a wider public?

TI: Exactly. It's tremendously important that we, as anthropologists, write in a way that is not popular but accessible. There's a difference between popular writing and accessible writing. Popular writing means to some extent pandering to the prejudices and stereotypes of your audience in order to get your point across. Writing accessibly means that you are not

making things artificially easy for your readers; that you are going out of your way to express what you have to say with clarity and precision. What annoys me very much is that a lot of researchers, not just in anthropology but in other fields as well, have simply given up on doing that. I think it's our responsibility as academics to write extremely clearly, and extremely accessibly. There are philosophers who have really good ideas on how biology might be reshaped, but they write in such a way that if you were to show their work to biologists, they would simply throw up their hands and say "this is complete gobbledygook!"

LFAF: Coming back to theory and its implications. Those who know your work are familiar with your concern with finding an alternative to orthodox ways of understanding evolution and with introducing the idea of relational approaches to understanding life. In orthodox evolutionary theory, notions of agency are quite lost. Do you consider that recovering the idea that human beings are agents has social value beyond the value of scientific knowledge itself?

TI: Well, I have my worries about the concept of agency – but that's a technical question. I think however that an ethical issue is involved here. Because one implication of the argument I want to put forward is that our humanity is not something that comes with the territory. It's not given by species membership or by belonging to this culture or that. Rather, we have continually to be creating our humanity for ourselves in what we do. That means we bear some collective responsibility for it. That's why I don't think you can separate scientific inquiry into human nature from the ethical questions about what being human in the contemporary world might entail. The questions of ethics and of our responsibilities for what we do are essential to the questions of how we address our own humanity.

LFAF: One more theoretical question; this has to do with the concept of "culture". Discussing how racialising thinking still pervades the sciences and how certain conceptions of culture are pervaded by that logic, you have also questioned the validity of thinking of cultures as discrete units. But nonetheless we often have to resort to the concept of culture to explain many things. For instance, in a paper in which you commented critically on notions of culture you remarked how deceptive universal notions of intelligence can be, particularly when they imply measurements. You begin by claiming that intelligence is itself a questionable concept, but then you go on to argue that

the way in which intelligence is generally measured is dependent on tests which are themselves "culture-bound". So it seems that it is difficult to escape the concept, and that after all we always come back to it. Other social scientists concur, saying that we have to keep on using this concept, because we haven't found or developed a better alternative. Even such a prominent sociologist as Wallerstein has explicitly said that he uses the concept in the absence of any better one, though it is very disappointing in many respects. Do you have any suggestion for what anthropologists can do here?

TI: That's a real problem. All the anthropologists I know hate the word culture but can't help using it. And it's the same with me. I really dislike the word; it comes with all sorts of unfortunate baggage. But it's very difficult to know what word to use instead. The way I would put it is that for us in anthropology, culture is the name of a question but it's not the answer. The question is, why and in what ways are humans different from one another? That's the question we're interested in. What makes some people do things this way and other people do things that way? Why are people doing things the ways they do, and why do these ways differ so much? That to me is the question. And it's perfectly alright to use the word 'culture' as a shorthand for that, it's just a question of culture; why are human beings so different in the things they do? But it is not the answer. To argue that cultural differences are due to culture is entirely circular. Neo-Darwinian approaches to cultural variation, which adopt a sort of genetic analogy, fall precisely on that circularity. They're explaining cultural differences in terms of something inside our heads and bodies that cannot be controlled. It's exactly the same mistake that biologists make when they say there is a gene for eye colour, when actually genetic differences can only account for differences in eye colour. So I think we can hold onto the concept of culture as a question, the guiding question, the thing that underwrites our inquiries. In just the same way, if you were a geographer then you would always be talking about space. In anthropology we keep talking about culture, that's what drives us. But when it comes to finding answers to the questions of culture, we have to go wherever we need to go. We might get into all sorts of interesting arguments about how people come to know what they do. Is it through apprenticeship, training in practice, or is it through some kind of inculcation or indoctrination? What different forms of learning are there? These are old and basic anthropological questions, and we can study them and that's fine. But what we can't do is simply say "cultural differences are due to culture." That won't explain anything.

LFAF: I would finally like to hear your view on the problems of generating scientific knowledge in a society in which, to an ever increasing extent and against what we assumed up until not too long ago, we see a strong revival in attempts to explain nature on the basis of metaphysical or even theological postulates. Even in the so-called Western world we are finding foci of rejection for scientific proposals in the explanation of the origins of humanity, which is again related to the mysteries of divine creation. Such explanations may carry little force in Britain, but they hold powerful sway in parts of North America, for instance. And in parts of South America politics and religion are very strongly intertwined. Do you think that there is a danger of a return to non-scientific explanations of human origins and existence in centres of education? If we confine ourselves to talking about science exclusively within the universities and forget about explaining things outside the academy, are we, in your opinion, facing a danger?

TI: There always is such a danger, but I think what we should be doing is tackling big questions head-on, and not retreating into an academic bubble. I once heard Paul Rabinow speak in a conference in Manchester in 2003. He was arguing that the anthropological approach should be one of what he called tangentiality. There might be a great debate raging, in which people are taking different sides and positions, but the job of the anthropologist, according to Rabinow, is to stand on the sidelines and analyse what is going on. I felt that this was quite wrong. The conference at which he presented this idea was about anthropology and science. As you know, the anthropology of science, along with science studies, is doing very well; it's popular and a lot of people are working in this area. Yet for the most part, anthropologists are not engaging directly with the scientific arguments themselves. They're more concerned with studying the scientists than with actually joining in the arguments that are going on in the science. People have sometimes, with some justification, pointed out that there's not much about politics in my work. If you are writing an article about something to do with human evolution, where would the politics come in? What is it that makes some scientists powerful and others not? To my mind, writing in a way that engages directly with issues, and that is accessible, and that takes issue with power within or outside science, that is a political act in itself. And it is much more political than simply writing about politics.

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