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Lines: A Brief History

By Tim Ingold



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Lines: A Brief History By Tim Ingold

What do walking, weaving, observing, storytelling, singing, drawing and writing have in common?

The answer is that they all proceed along lines. In this extraordinary book Tim Ingold imagines a world in which everyone and everything consists of interwoven or interconnected lines and lays the foundations for a completely new discipline: the anthropological archaeology of the line.

Ingold's argument leads us through the music of Ancient Greece and contemporary Japan, Siberian labyrinths and Roman roads, Chinese calligraphy and the printed alphabet, weaving a path between antiquity and the present.

Setting out from a puzzle about the relation between speech and song, Ingold considers how two kinds of line – threads and traces – can turn into one another as surfaces form or dissolve. He reveals how our perception of lines has changed over time, with modernity converting to point-to-point connectors before becoming straight, only to be ruptured and fragmented by the postmodern world.

Drawing on a multitude of disciplines including archaeology, classical studies, art history, linguistics, psychology, musicology, philosophy and many others, and including more than seventy illustrations, this book takes us on an exhilarating intellectual journey that will change the way we look at the world and how we go about in it.



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Editorial Review

Review

‘*Lines* – a profound, rich and fascinating meditation on the multiple meanings interwoven within that simple word: from forest tracks to genealogies, from the acts of writing to patterned house decorations. Tim Ingold’s wide-ranging book escapes disciplinary, cultural and temporal boundaries. Read it, and you will never feel quite the same again about using a computer or taking a journey.’ - Steven Rose, *Emeritus Professor of Biology, The Open University*

‘This is a book whose pictures alone are worth the money. Till I started to follow Tim Ingold’s path through this fascinating maze, I had never noticed how many different kinds of line there are, nor how badly we go wrong when we don’t distinguish between them. As he shows, we Westerners keep replacing sensitive, living lines with ones that are static and mechanical, and it’s quite a mistake to think that this makes us more rational.’ - Mary Midgley, *Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, The University of Newcastle*

‘Ingold’s eventual incorporation of anthropological examples from eastern Peru is really where we begin to see a master at work – Ingold intimately understands the data and interpretation flows in an engaging way ... this is a vibrant read – at times when reading I shouted aloud, ‘Yes spot on!’ at other times I paced the room and exclaimed in frustration ‘No!’. That Ingold’s writing can produce such dramatic effects is a testament to the quality of his argument. Do I recommend reading this book? Definitely.’ – *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*

‘The author's ambition, to take a virgin piece of interdisciplinary territory and "write on it a bit", has been fascinatingly achieved.’ - Steven Poole, *The Guardian*

"As alluded to in the quote on the book's cover, it is difficult to see the world the same way after reading this book. And that may be the larger meaning to take away: as Ingold (Univ. of Aberdeen) shows, earlier conceptions of speech and writing were intimately interconnected with movement, and as wayfarers journey through the world, neither they nor the book's reader are the same as when they started. ... Highly recommended." -- *CHOICE April 2008 Vol. 45 (M. Ebert, University of Saskatchewan)*

About the Author

Tim Ingold is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, UK.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Harvey Hobbs:

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