

MAIS 601: Critical Reflection Essay
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In his essay “Building, dwelling, living: How animals and people make themselves at home in the world” (2000), Tim Ingold compares the building and dwelling perspectives, and how the concepts are considered by various social scientists, including conventional views from anthropology, and less conventional views from philosophers like Martin Heidegger. He also discusses how his own viewpoint has changed over the years, from a more conventional anthropological view where human creations are distinct from the natural environment, towards the view that humans are a part of the natural environment.

Ingold originally held a more conventional anthropological view that there is a dichotomy between nature and culture, and that there is a distinction between the built environment (created by humans) and the unbuilt environment inhabited by everything else. He states that his viewpoint was unreconstructed Cartesian dualism, “that unlike all other animals, humans live a split-level existence, half in nature, half out; half organism, half person; half body, half mind” (p. 172). This view of differentiating humanity from the environment is not uncommon, and is exemplified by anthropocentrism, where humanity is the central entity in the world. I’ve found it difficult to get my mind around Ingold’s change of view and to understand dwelling because we are taught an anthropocentric viewpoint from very early on, whether that viewpoint comes via religion or via traditional educational instruction. Anthropocentrism is made to seem like it is common sense because humanity creates such complex constructions in the world, moving away from the natural forms of trees and other creatures that are considered resources or “neutral objects” (p. 176), creating a world separate from the natural environment. The building perspective is that “worlds are made before they are lived in” (p. 179); we must build the house before we dwell within it. Humans are dwelling separate from the natural environment because they have designed and created their own homes and have built upon the knowledge of prior humans in their construction. Anthropocentrism also seems to lead to egocentrism, a selfishness that disregards the effects of humanity on the environment. A climate survey taken just before the COP26 meetings in Glasgow noted that most people were unwilling to change their lifestyle to be more environmentally friendly unless it was something they had already prioritized. (Henley, 2021)

The essay’s title is a nod to Martin Heidegger’s article “Building Dwelling Thinking”, which outlines the etymology of the word building or bauen in its Old English and High German verb form of buan: “The real meaning of the verb bauen, namely, to dwell, has been lost to us” (1971). Sutida Turcot stated that the Thai word “bahn” means home, and that “in Thai, one does not ‘build’ a house, one ‘plants’ it” (2021) so it isn’t just Western languages that have a similar etymology. Where this concept of dwelling became difficult for me was in moving beyond the foreground, modern meaning of the word, where we dwell within buildings, and shifting towards dwelling, meaning that we live within the world and can thus construct within it. As Ingold (2000) states, “In short, people do not import their ideas, plans or mental representations into the world, since that very world, to borrow a phrase from Merleau-Ponty (1962: 24), is the homeland of their thoughts” (p. 186). Humanity is not isolated from the environment as self-contained individuals, but are a part of the world, as are all living beings. We experience our lives as a part of the world, much like any other creature, whether they be animal or insect, though often our world contains more complex creations than those made or

lived in by other creatures. Van't Schip noted that indigenous people "generally already hold this holistic, interconnected way of seeing and being in the world--belonging as part of the ecology." (2021) It is the Western world that needs to come around to this way of thinking.

Ingold's transformation from conventional anthropological view to a more inclusive one, where humans are part of the world rather than being separate, challenged my assumptions. It surprised me that my own concept of humanity and the world was very anthropocentric and while I had thought humanity had its part to play in the environment, my view had kept me on the outside looking in.

Critical Questions for discussion:

- 1) How might changing an anthropocentric view of the world change how we live or dwell?
- 2) How can deconstructing language, as Heidegger and Ingold do with the words "build" and "dwell", help in understanding concepts?

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