

What lines, rats and sheep can tell us.

For Salim — our dear family companion who, lying before me, I see through his breathing, slow movements and how he folds himself, is readying to leave us.

“... baboons are not seen to inhabit a world of non-baboons, or ants to inhabit a world of non-ants. Apparently only humans inhabit a world of nonhumans, which makes it seem to me to be a very anthropometric formulation.”¹

Tim Ingold

In *Designs Along a Length of String*, Tim Ingold generously invites us into his thoughts on lines and meshworks.² In a lecture theatre crisscrossed with a mesh of string—real string!—we are literally and figuratively asked to feel how lines feel. Through Ingold’s eyes, his pacing, touching, writing, wording, and the string around us, we see how lines thread, join, loop, knot, turn back on themselves, and hang loose and open... offering the space for more.

For me, Ingold’s talk of flourishing lines and emergent relations speaks to his longstanding ideas on the processional. With his lines and their processional becomings, he is giving us the space to think, a “tool for thinking”, as philosopher Isabelle Stengers uses the phrase.³ In the following, I want to think with Ingold’s ideas and attempt to work with them in just this fashion, as a tool. To begin, I’ll draw out some of the key concepts Ingold introduced in his closing plenary at Research Through Design in 2015 and weave these into

1 Tim Ingold, “Designs Along a Length of String - Closing Plenary,” *Research Through Design, RTD ‘15*, Cambridge UK (27 March, 2015).

2 Ingold, “Designs Along a Length of String.”

3 Isabelle Stengers, “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices,” *Cultural Studies Review* 11 (2013): 185.

ideas he has developed in his writings. I then want to thread a new line of questions into this thinking by taking Vinciane Despret's beautiful accounts of animal-human relations. For many this may seem like an unexpected turn, but my intention here is to use the coupling of works from Ingold and Despret to complicate how we as design researchers and practitioners think and work *through design*. By turning our attention to what Ingold refers to as the *sympathy* we build up with things and, at the same time, how these as Despret calls them *active attunements* afford the conditions for 'new existences'⁴, I want to suggest design is much more than a mere augmenting of human ability. What especially interests me are the conditions made possible *through-design* and what *more-than-human* capacities are given a chance in the lively relations between humans and nonhumans. Thus, in this knotting together of ideas, what I'm keen to do is engage in a widening of *research through design*. My hope is to offer a different way of engaging with the conference series' short history and put forward a generative alternative that might be enacted *through design*.



Figure 1

Tim Ingold, enmeshed in string, in his Research Through Design 2015 Provocation, "Designs Along a Length of String."

4 Vinciane Despret, *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

Lines

The line is Ingold's *magnum opus*; his own thread of stories of walking, cutting, drawing, sawing, weaving, dwelling, all draw us back to the ways lines are processually brought into the world, how what comes before and what is to follow gives form to a present *movement*.⁵ The line is Ingold's answer to the network with its "timeless, motionless, inert" assemblages of nodes and connections. For Ingold, the assemblage "will not help... It is too static, and it fails to answer the question of how the entities of which it is composed actually fasten to each other." Yet the line, he contrasts "allows us to bring the social back to life. In the life of lines, parts are not components; they are movements."⁶ The line is then in motion, never static, always leading to something or somewhere else. This is, provocatively, a "world without objects".⁷

The meshwork is a corollary, for there are many lines that thread through and between the lives of humans and nonhumans. Here we don't limit ourselves to "blobs", as Ingold calls them, but lines, loops and knots that thread together the lively connections. Again, we are directed away from the static, lifeless point, the thing, and led to see the always becoming, the 'goings-on'. As Ingold puts it, "[t]he thing about things... is that they *occur* - that is, they carry on along their lines."⁸ This is precisely why Ingold draws our attention to the generative and emergent qualities of lines, and their twists and knottings in meshworks.

The meshwork of lines also puts relations, centre stage. Ingold's fascination is with the ways our own lines crisscross with sentient and less than sentient others, how the lines

5 Tim Ingold, "Walking the Plank: Meditations on a Process of Skill," in *Defining Technological Literacy: Towards an Epistemological Framework*, ed. John Dakers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 65–80.

6 Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines* (Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2015), 15.

7 Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 13-16.

8 Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 16.

that surround us afford a becoming in the world. Here we find the back and forth of sawing a plank is shaped by the cut before, and the one to come, but so too by the wood with its grain, the weight of hands and bodies. All work together. Not only does one cut into the plank, the making exerts a force back on the maker.⁹ Ingold extends this further with his *growing-in-making* or *anthropogenesis*, where the making is wound together with the being, where what we are and what we become is actively threaded into the practices of making. In knitting, “the shape of the clothing might map onto the bodily form of the wearer” but the shape of the garment and the way the body is held to wear it “arises from countless micro-gestures of threading and looping that turn a continuous thread of yarn into a surface”.¹⁰

For design, then, this gives us a distinctive way to talk about how it approaches its task, how, piece by piece, iteratively, and along a continuous line, transformations are made and remade. The ways we cut, draw, sketch, stitch, mould, weave, these are movements made in and along a line of string, that knot, shift and flow into others. We might say, as Ingold does, design is forever in an unfolding ‘attunement’ and all manner of things are in continual emergence through a rhythm of relations:

“The task of the builder is... to bring one way of life and growth (of the tree in the forest) to a close in preparation for the launching of another (of the craft in the ocean).”¹¹

There is one might say a similar thread here to Donald Schön’s *reflective practice*,¹² though perhaps one that is grounded more in the material experience, shedding light on how

9 For a wonderfully detailed description of sawing a plank of wood, see Ingold, “Walking the Plank.”

10 Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 122-124.

11 Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 121.

12 Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Basic books, 1983).

we string ourselves together with others in practice and use such material enactments to *reflect-in-action*, to move, shift, adjust, as we saw through the plank of wood. Similarly, Ingold speaks to the mesh of interconnecting lines through which design emerges, “the tangle of conversations occurring during design activities... and the conversations that take place in various *design arenas*.”¹³ Again, though, with Ingold the attention is brought very much back to the hands, to the physical relations we thread together in making. Through a processional language of practice, we see “the form of a thing does not stand over it or lie behind it but emerges from this mutual shaping, within a gathering of forces, both tensile and frictional, established through the engagement of the practitioner with materials that have their own inclinations and vitality.”¹⁴

But, for me at least, the processional qualities and relational unfoldings that Ingold surfaces have a deeper resonance for design. What grabs me in his ideas is a view of design that is always (whether it imagines itself to be doing so or not) working towards what can be, not stuck in the realm of what is (or is not), or what limits exist. Design, as Ingold repeatedly recounts it, is materially embedded or entangled in the endless threading together of preceding and present lines, always laying the foundations for what is to come: “You begin to think of design actually as a correspondence of lines that are twisting around one another...”

¹⁵ And correspondence, for Ingold, is about much more than the subject and object, human agency and its mastery over the thing, but accounts for active trajectories and transformations that occur between human and non-human lives.¹⁶

13 Emphasis in original. Ezio Manzini, "Design Culture and Dialogic Design." *Design Issues* 32 (2016): 54.

14 Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 24.

15 Ingold, "Designs along a length of string."

16 In articulating his idea of correspondence, Ingold seeks to put the active human back into the world and amongst things. He counters anthropomorphic or human centric 'capacities of conscious intentionality and agency' by replacing intention

This, I want to suggest, offers us an expansive view of design where “things are continually coming into being through processes of growth and movement”.¹⁷ Not only does this view place design in an exploratory mode.¹⁸ It puts a lot of hard questions to those who want to draw tidy lines between ourselves as autonomous actors and the tools used to design, and indeed what is produced through design. Thus, in surfacing the many connections and distribution of agencies, it forces us to ask what we mean when we talk about a design that is human-centred, that places the human as part of but still somehow separate from material practice. Ingold tells us that making, in its broadest sense, can’t be simply bracketed off from being nor can being from making. We are in an unending thread of becoming as we make: “humans are not just the producers of objects to consume. They too are transformed in the process; what they achieve is achieved in them.”¹⁹

What I want to do in the remains of this article is use this as an inflection point to ask what it means to design and research *through design*, what effects and affects are we seeking to enliven, in what ways are we hoping to make an impression in worlds, and ultimately what relations do we hope to afford between ourselves and the things we are aspiring to live with and through. Taking Ingold’s invitation to heart, I want to make the case that it no longer seems good enough to see the things we design as tools or instruments that merely augment our capacities, that offer, in a very limited sense, materials that overcome our intrinsic human limits so that we might see, hear, reach, grasp, draw, make, etc. better. Again, we find in Ingold an attunement with the world of things, where through our unfolding relations we

with attention, subject with verb, and human agency with ‘doing-in-undergoing of humanifying’. See Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 152.

17 Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 13.

18 Referring to Daniel Fallman’s use of exploratory. See Daniel Fallman, “The interaction design research triangle of design practice, design studies, and design exploration,” *Design Issues* 24 (2008): 4-18.

19 Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 155.

emerge as more-than-human.²⁰ *Unbounded* through our relations and rapport with things, we are enabled to do *and* be so much more than autonomous actors, we extend ourselves through mutual forces (impressions and sensations) on both sides—the twists and knots binding two lines of string, giving form to and shaping the movement of both.

Other Beings

Yet I'd like to develop my thinking not with Ingold's lines alone, but with the introduction of what might seem an unusual and admittedly peculiar companion, namely a view into ethology, and specifically the view of Vinciane Despret's and her profoundly uplifting and intellectually arousing examination of the lives we humans share with other living animals. This, as I've said, may seem a peculiar disjuncture but my guess is that Ingold might appreciate the parallel. In the quote I have used to open this article, Ingold is in the midst of reminding us that in a contemporary philosophy obsessed by the relations between humans and nonhumans, we find a peculiar lack of interest in animals. So, through no lesser medium than his RTD talk, we might say that Ingold is inviting us to speculate on such matters.²¹

What's more, Despret, I feel, responds with a reasonable rapprochement to Ingold's worries about the term *assemblage*. Referring to the translation of Giles Deleuze's *agencement* to *assemblage*, she writes:

“I would rather opt for keeping the French word: *agencement*. First, this term renders perceptible the intimate link between “*agencement*” and “agency,” and

20 Hannah Pitt has used Ingold directly to develop such a view of “more-than-human”. See Hanna Pitt, “On showing and being shown plants—a guide to methods for more-than-human geography,” *Area* 47 (2015): 48-55. On “more-than-human”, also see Sarah Whatmore's inspirational piece: “Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world. *Cultural Geographies* 13 (2006): 600-609.

21 Ingold also has written at this intersection of animals and humans. See Tim Ingold, ed., *What is an Animal?* (London: Routledge, 1994).

second, it insists upon an active process of attunement that is never fixed once and for all. An *agencement* is a rapport of forces that makes some beings capable of making other beings capable, in a plurivocal manner, in such a way that the *agencement* resists being dismembered, resists clear-cut distribution.”²²

Despret at one level then is dealing with matters very similar to Ingold. She troubles assemblage in much the same way and points, like him, to the ‘active process[es] of attunement’ that resist a separation from the rapiers and plurivocality of the *agencement*. This, I hope it is fair to say, sounds very much like the many entwined threads or lines of the meshwork.

Yet, for me, it is Despret’s unique reading of animals and their manifold relations that equips us with a way to further work through the kind of thinking that Ingold invites. To be specific, what matters here, that I think is deeply relevant for design and the particular thread of thinking we are following, is Despret’s open mindedness to an expansion of agential capabilities.²³ By paying close attention to Despret’s work (and the many scholars she recognises in her writings), we find not only much in common with Ingold’s ideas of the processional, but a catalogue of detailed examples of how mutual relations can be thought of as extending or expanding capability. In celebrating her achievements, Buchanan, Chrulew and Busso write of Despret’s work as “the practical study of what humans or animals can

22 Vinciane Despret, “From Secret Agents to Interagency,” *History and Theory*, 52 (2013): 38.

23 I’m mindful of the concern for capabilities shown in design, such as that from Ilse Oosterlaken. While I’m not unsympathetic to Oosterlaken’s call to be led by human capabilities rather than the more limiting income, resource provisioning, utility etc., the point I aim to put forward is more about how capability is enacted through human-nonhuman relations, that we might be open to more than human capabilities coming into being. See Ilse Oosterlaken, “Design for Development: A Capability Approach,” *Design Issues*, 25 (2009): 91-102.

do”. Her view onto multispecies relations is, they explain, “not of what they are, of their essence, but of what they’re capable, of what they’re doing, of the powers that are theirs...”²⁴

In reading her catalogue of stories, it is difficult not to be compelled by Despret’s sensitivity to how connections are made and relations unfold to produce something *more-than*, something only possible through precisely the activities of a woman feeding her sheep, a breeder talking with his cows, or a parrot talking with an ethologist. In over 20 years of thinking and writing about these matters, Despret has strung together far too many wonderful and generative stories to repeat here. I want to, though, touch on just two areas of her work that I think will help us build up a sense of what her ideas can offer.

First, let me turn to a seemingly straightforward case. Despret has put a good deal of thought into the behavioural experiments that rats (and other animals) are subject to, and specifically the use of the manufactured maze as an artefact of experimentation.²⁵ We know the drill, a rat is deprived of something—food, senses, body parts, etc.—or imbibed with something—drugs, alcohol, nicotine, etc.—and s/he is then judged for her/his capacity to learn and navigate a maze (usually to find food). So, on the face of it, the test here would seem to be whether the rat has an instinctive capacity for navigation and spatial learning. And this test operates on the premise that everything else can be controlled so that rats only navigate a maze when they are hungry and to obtain food (crucially, this biological register forms the basis for claiming any observable capacity can be generalised to other animals, including humans). Yet, with Despret’s guidance, we immediately run into a question about these sorts of experiments that is never seriously asked, but would appear to be quite

24 Brett Buchanan, Matthew Chrulow and Jeffrey Busso, “On Asking the Right Questions,” *Angelaki*, 20 (2015): 116.

25 See Vinciane Despret, “Thinking Like a Rat,” *Angelaki* 20 (2015): 121–34, and, Vinciane Despret, “L for Laboratory: What Are Rats Interested in During Experiments,” in *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions*.

fundamental to what is at stake: “how can this possibly interest an animal?” or to phrase it slightly differently, as perhaps the animal might, “what could they possibly be interested in?”

26

If we think through these experiments and follow, as Despret does, what happens “back stage” we find that animals of all kinds (cats, rats, parrots, etc.) often fail to be “conditioned” for the particular purposes of the controlled experiment—put simply, food doesn’t seem to be the only imperative and the wider experimental conditions, no matter how restrictive the controls, confound the efforts to determine general accounts of animal/human behaviour. On food deprivation, cats refuse to eat; subject to repeated recordings of human speech, paired with food rewards, myna birds show disinterest in talking; in carefully controlled environments, rats are better at learning routes if the experimenters think they are intelligent; and so on. However, ‘off stage’, in a multitude of ways, these animals show capabilities that exceed the narrow view presented by these (null) results: cats show a curiosity in the lives of their experimenters; myna birds talk when their experimenters take them home; and rats, amongst other things, reportedly run faster when observed by humans. These ‘results’ are never reported because they contravene the motives of the experiment and fail to correctly respond to what the experiment and experimenters have set out to answer:

“If an animal responds according to his own habits, in the register of what interests him, the researchers would consider this a kind of ‘ruse’—he admittedly did what was asked of him, but he did so for the “wrong reasons.”²⁷

What experimental research of this kind does is everything in its power to compartmentalise and purify the conditions, but in so doing it strips them of precisely those

26 Despret, “Thinking Like a Rat.”

27 Despret, “What Are Rats Interested in.”

things that make the world meaningful. Rats are literally striped of their senses, mazes are stripped of their discerning features, and experimenters are persuaded to leave the details of the relations with animals 'off stage'. Sort for is a primitive, innate stimulus-response pair, which might somehow exist outside the meanings and relevances of those animals being examined. What is left bears little to no relationship to the world that the experiment is hoping to produce some general point on/in. The situation is nothing more than perverse.

Despret can't help but see the funny side:

“The humor of the situation is too nice not to be underlined: the researchers compartmentalize the research; the animals do not stop prompting them to decompartmentalize it.”²⁸

For Despret much of the trouble comes down to asking the right questions. And for her, the right questions are not whether animals can be duped into responding this way or that to some stimulus that has little or no relevance to them, but instead whether we can ask questions that give animals the chance to convey their own interests and ways of doing things, and that give them the opportunity to communicate these to us humans.

So, already, it might seem we are a long way from the design of things, and what we might want to do *through design*, but there is, I feel, a point here that should be important to us. In short, we might understand a good deal of work done through design to compartmentalise in a similar way. Yes, we grapple with being sensitive to the contexts in which actions and activities occur,²⁹ and indeed to a wider culture,³⁰ but we have very few if

28 Despret, "Thinking Like a Rat," 130.

29 The hackneyed lesson we've taken, from amongst others, Lucy Suchman. See Lucy Suchman, *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions, 2nd Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

30 See Manzini, "Design Culture."

any tools (or a register) for working with everything, altogether. By viewing things in terms of affordances, human actions, and system outputs, we do not seem all that far from that innate stimulus-response pair. We reduce things to a sequence of defined steps—a tool’s design, input, interaction, output—and neglect the world that is being lived in and how living brings things together so that they have meaning and relevance to us. That is, in order to determine some general principles about a design, through design, we have turned our attention away from those very things we do to make the world personally meaningful. We have failed to develop ways to think and talk in terms of the dialogue we build up with the surroundings: with other humans and nonhumans, and with the ways these relations unfold over time.³¹ And we too easily forget to recognise that our experiences with the artefacts we design cannot be bracketed off or compartmentalised from what is meaningful, and how that meaning is brought, actively, into the world.³² For Ingold, lines speak directly to this:

“You begin to think of design actually as a correspondence of lines that are twisting around one another... And instead of thinking about articulation—articulation means the coupling of rigid elements—we actually talk about sympathy, which is about the way in which things are continually responding to one another. So I’m thinking we should think about design in terms of sympathetic

31 There is a parallel here with Grant Kester’s idea of *dialogical interaction*. Kester build’s on Habermas’ theory of discourse to suggest a dialogical aesthetic where meaning is not intrinsic in a piece, or definitively controlled by the artist, but something provisional, actively built up between an artwork and a collective of onlookers or co-participants. See Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

32 I think Annemarie Mol’s *ontological politics* and *ontonorms* add a complementary perspective to this active becoming. I like how Mol writes of the hope to “sensitise us to materialities and issues of good and bad at the same time.” Through this, she draws and holds matter, meaning and value together, laying the basis for a register for everything altogether. See Annemarie Mol, “Mind Your Plate! The Ontonorms of Dutch Dieting,” *Social Studies of Science* 43 (2013): 381.

relationships or what I call correspondence rather than in terms of the articulation of elements.”³³

I feel though, that Despret provides us with a grounding for what we might actually wish to research through design. Finding inspiration in Despret’s work, design might concern itself, dare I say, with the unfolding dialogue targeted at answering that question “in what are *you* interested?” Research through design would be a starting place for speculating on how we begin such a dialogue that doesn’t compartmentalise and that accounts for the richer, emerging set of relations: “... this has to do with beings who negotiate the conditions of research, who mutually affect one another, who exchange judgments and opinions, who reciprocally modify one another and who know that they do it.”³⁴ So design might offer up the space not to enforce—from the outside—what should interest us, but to begin wondering how we might be open to the possibilities of what could *become* interesting, of how to develop, twist and cultivate these possibilities between an artefact and its user. This is to take seriously a design that is open to the question “How could this possibly be *made* interesting?”

The second area of Despret’s work that I want to draw on is related to this openness, but it gives us a way of handling things that again I think design has much to build on. One of Despret’s stories that I especially like considers sheep and the ways they organise themselves. The ‘classical’ view in ethology, as Despret refers to it, is that sheep are most obviously characterised by their instinctive drive to eat (much like rats). The trouble is, this version of the collective behaviour of sheep does nothing to overcome the strikingly superficial understanding we have of sheep, nor does it account for the vexing questions that arise if a bit more care is put into understanding the lives sheep live. It fails to consider, for

33 Ingold, “Designs along a length of string.”

34 Despret, “Thinking Like a Rat,” 131.

example, that the preoccupation with sheep and their food may be because eating is one of the easier things to find sheep doing, or that so much of what we observe sheep doing is dictated by the strict regimes of breeding to which they are subject—any inventiveness in sheep is quickly selected out of a flock. It is little wonder that we know so little about what sheep are interested in, other than grass. As Despret puts it:

“they [sheep] have never been able to testify to what interests them since whatever it is that might interest them has been offered no affordance, no possibility of articulation with what interests those who attest on their behalf.”³⁵

One recurrent trope that has been spun from this impoverished version of sheep is that of the hierarchy,³⁶ and specifically the way the competition for food is said to play a central role in determining the organisation of sheep. Sheep flocks are repeatedly characterised as led by long-horned, dominant males that fight for the control: “corresponding to theories of hierarchy (they obtain the right to push their way around with their horns, the males in front and the females behind).”³⁷ However Despret, through the work of Thelma Rowell (a primatologist who has turned her attention to sheep), suggests another version of events that is equally plausible and, it must be said, seems to be considerably more attentive to the situations sheep come to be in.

Challenging what she calls the “scandal” of the hierarchy, Rowell makes the claim that it is not food alone that occupies sheep or that dictates their social organisation, but, and arguably more importantly, a concern for predators. A possible reason for their seemingly

35 Vinciane Despret, “Sheep Do Have Opinions,” In, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006): 363.

36 Despret offers a provocative critique of hierarchy in her recent book. See Vinciane Despret, “H is for Hierarchy: Might the Dominance of Males be a Myth,” in *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

37 Despret, “Sheep Do Have Opinions,” 354.

perspicuous concern for food may be that the human observer is in fact a deterrent for predators. Much of the effort and organisation invested in managing predation is mitigated by the presence of human observers—ethologists and the like—so what we witness is them getting on with the business of eating. Perversely, in observing them and reducing their apparent capacities through our limited register, we have, quite possibly, given them the opportunity to widen their repertoire, to allow them to use what human observers afford—safety—to arrange and organise themselves differently.

Further complicating matters, and showing a sophistication not accounted for by the hierarchy model, Rowell shows the fighting between rams for leadership is largely limited to the one month of mating each year; that fights are highly ritualised and performative, with few signs of all-out battles for a blunt idea of supremacy; that it can often be older females that lead flocks outside of mating season; that there are relationships other than the usually fleeting fights between males that deserve attention, such as the ‘friendships’ between males and the lasting companionships between ewes and their daughters.³⁸

This string of alternative accounts, that offer different versions of sheep’s lives, led Rowell to design an inventive kind of device for observing sheep. As Despret recounts, Rowell’s device, one devised during a time in which—following her primatology training—she effectively lived amongst the sheep, was the introduction of an additional food bowl. She fed her twenty-two companions from twenty-three bowls. This device, a strikingly small and simple one, was designed to offer the sheep the chance to display an alternative to the orthodoxy in ethology: that a hierarchical configuration organised for the purposes of food

38 For a helpful overview of the complications, see Vinciane Despret, “Culture and Gender Do Not Dissolve into How Scientists “Read” Nature: Thelma Rowell’s Heterodoxy,” in, *Rebels, Mavericks, and Heretics in Biology*, ed. Oren Harman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008): 338-355. Examples of Rowell’s work on sheep include Thelma Rowell and C.A. Rowell, “The organization of feral Ovis Aries Ram Groups in the Pre-rut Period,” *Ethology*, 95 (1993): 213-232, and Thelma Rowell, “Till Death do us Part: Long-lasting Bonds between Ewes and their Daughters,” *Animal Behavior* 42 (1991): 681-682.

consumption might not be all that matters to sheep. Just as the human observer might afford a new repertoire, the additional bowl of food was Rowell's invitation to the sheep to reveal something they had not been given the chance to do before, to show themselves to be socially sophisticated.

To make the leap back to design, as an example, this device moves us closer to what it might look like to, through design, be open in the way I detailed earlier. What I think is helpful here is what Despret refers to as *versions*.³⁹ Like Ingold's lines and their corresponding meshworks, these versions speak to the multiple threads that bring the world into being; Despret's "versions draw a web".⁴⁰ But there are more to these versions. What Despret does is use the idea not just to suggest a plurality of worlds that affect us, but an openness to worlds coexisting and from this an openness to the possibility of other worlds, other versions. For Despret, then, they amount to a device that affords hesitation, that allows for a pause and to ask questions about what might just be possible, how differences might flourish and allow many more entities to be active".⁴¹ As Bruno Latour writes in the foreword of Despret's latest book, this amounts to an *additive empiricism*, one that is "interested in objective facts and grounded claims" but seeks to "complicate, to specify, and, whenever possible, to slow down and, above all, hesitate so as to multiply the voices that can be heard."

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So, through design, the question of openness comes to be about how we might offer the chance for other possibilities and how these possibilities might be 'additive', how they

³⁹ Vinciane Despret, "The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro-zoo-genesis," *Body & Society*, 10 (2004): 111–134.

⁴⁰ Vinciane Despret, "V for Versions: Do Chimpanzees Die Like We Do?," in *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

⁴¹ Despret, "Body We Care For," 123.

⁴² See Bruno Latour's foreword in: Despret, "What Would Animals Say."

might be devices that give a chance for ‘many more entities’ to be active. As Despret herself conveys, this stands in stark contrast to the *vision*, something we so often find in design. The vision implies there is some position to be taken, some predisposition to one version over others; it is more of an opinion. Version speaks to the “plurality and mutual transformability” of worlds.⁴³

So these versions are lines of becoming, lines open to transformations. As both Ingold and Despret talk about, the transformations in our being occur in and through the interminglings. As Ingold asks so astutely: “Is not the workman, too, a being among others, including non-human others, whose mastery only follows what they have granted him...? Are we not always *with* things before we do anything to them?”⁴⁴ Yet, through Despret’s concern for those non-human others, I get a stronger sense of what forms the underpinnings of this being ‘granted’ and being ‘with’; this is the possibility, through new articulations and co-figurings, for things to transgress what is assumed to be their essence, to actively undergo *metamorphosis* by attunement or “becoming-with”.⁴⁵

Moreover, Despret’s understanding of *authorising* adds a further depth to these versions. In her article *The body we care for: figures of anthropo-zoo-genesis* she introduces us to thinking of “expectations in terms of ‘who authorises’,” from which she suggests “we can see that everything is shifting, articulating many more things, giving chances to many more entities to belong to the real world.” The crux of the matter, for Despret, seems to turn on trust and faith—of trusting that and having faith in worlds that could just be more open to

43 Buchanan offers a helpful precis of Despret’s use of versions. See Brett Buchanan, “The Metamorphoses of Vinciane Despret.” *Angelaki* 20 (2015): 24.

44 Ingold, “*Life of Lines*,” 128.

45 Yet again, Ingold and Despret draw many parallels here. Both write of the active processes of ‘becoming together’ and use the language of attunement and metamorphosis to capture the mutual, ongoing relations. See Despret, “*Responding bodies*,” and Ingold, “*Life of Lines*.”

different ways of being. In this realm, not only might we think of designed artefacts *affording* actions or behaviours. In countering the repertoire of limitations and “redistributing the influence”, we might also come to think of them (and the conditions they are used in) as authorising other possibilities, other versions. How a thing (in particular conditions) can authorise, through design, becomes a strategy to invite more versions, to give more versions a chance: “it allows us to transform a cascade of bad faith into its opposite, into a cascade of new existences raising new questions.”⁴⁶

Going-on

To set the openings in motion, and offer that little bit more faith and trust in things, I want to make clear that I have not, above, been making a superficial case for likening animals, animals such as rats and sheep, to the artefacts we design—that would be wrong in too many ways. For me, the relevance for design here is a deeper and more profound one. It is concerned with animating the relations we have with things in the world (and the relations they have to us) and finding ways to extend the mutual capacities, the mutual becomings. This directs our attention not only towards the product, service, or indeed experience we design. It draws us into expanding the capacities our endlessly unfolding relations have for creating and extending ourselves-with-others. The opportunity arises to understand ‘through-design’ not as a way to sketch out a vector space for research, but to speculate on ‘becoming-with’—becoming with the world, becoming with the conditions and capabilities design might make possible.

To come back to Ingold, his invitation to consider design beyond what he calls articulation is a helpful one: “So I’m thinking we should think about design in terms of sympathetic relationships or what I call correspondence rather than in terms of the

46 Despret, “Body We Care For,” 120-121.

articulation of elements.”⁴⁷ Too easily, through design, we can feel the impulse to be responsive to our capacities, seeing them as a set of primitive or primordial needs to be accommodated and it seems to be this that leads us into the language of articulation or augmentation. We see tools as a way to somehow work with and within our limits, and thus the need to couple, as Ingold refers to them, two “rigid elements”. What we find in Despret’s stories with animals, as well as Ingold’s strings and lines, are lessons for how we might begin to treat the relations—the correspondences—as openings, as opportunities and possibilities for more sympathetic, richer, and more expansive ways of becoming together. As I see it, this provides us with the possibility of getting past the limiting language of human-centredness, that cannot do anything but over-estimate our mastery and agency in the world. Our entangled lines and lives with animals give us the possibility to dream for new entities and, through design, to begin to give these entities the chance:

“If one is designing along a length of string then it’s about hopes and dreams not about the plans and predictions. It’s where the hopes and dreams always exceed, overstep any kinds of ends you might place for them. So designers’ longing is something like breaking a trail, it’s open ended, it deals with hopes and dreams rather than plans and predictions...”⁴⁸

47 Ingold, “Designs Along a Length of String.”

48 Ingold, “Designs Along a Length of String.”