

# Making Porosity More Porous: An Open Call for Brainstorming After Tanya Luhrmann's Recent Findings



Narediti poroznost bolj porozno: odprt poziv  
k razmišljanju po nedavnih ugotovitvah Tanye Luhrmann

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the potential of “porosity” in understanding the “supernatural”, particularly in interactions with spirits and gods. According to Luhrmann, a “porous” self is key to experiencing the supernatural. Unlike a “buffered” self with a compacted boundary between mind and world, a porous self integrates anomalous experiences more easily. Sharing Luhrmann’s transdisciplinary approach, this article looks into the potential of porosity in addressing reflexivity challenges and phenomenological ones, while advocating for more porous transdisciplinary communication.

KEYWORDS: porosity, religious studies, transdisciplinarity, phenomenology, spatial metaphors

## IZVLEČEK

Članek raziskuje potencial »poroznosti« za razumevanje »nadnaravnega«, zlasti v interakcijah z duhovi in bogovi. Za Tanyo Luhrmann je »porozen« jaz ključnega pomena za doživljanje nadnaravnega. Za razliko od »zaščitenega« jaza s strnjeno mejo med umom in svetom, porozen jaz lažje integrira anomalne izkušnje. Članek na podlagi transdisciplinarnega pristopa Luhrmannove proučuje potencial poroznosti pri obravnavanju izzivov refleksivnosti in fenomenoloških izzivov, hkrati pa se zavzema za bolj porozno transdisciplinarno komunikacijo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: poroznost, študij religije, transdisciplinarnost, fenomenologija, prostorske metafore

Recently, Tanya Luhrmann and her team have shared the results of their vast empirical research on the relationship between porosity and the sensory reporting of gods and spirits (Luhrmann 2020a, 2020b; Luhrmann et al. 2021, 2023; Luhrmann and Weisman 2022).<sup>1</sup> Comprising four studies with over two thousand participants from different religions in China, Ghana, Thailand, the United States, and Vanuatu, they propose that cultural models of the mind and individual perspectives on the mind strongly influence how people perceive and interpret their experiences with what they take to be spirits or gods. These influences contribute to cultural and individual variations in the way spiritual experiences are reported. Luhrmann's main hypothesis about the role of porosity goes as follows:

The sensory and quasisensory events that people take to be the presence of spirit [...] are found both in the foundational stories of faith and surprisingly often in the lives of the faithful. These events become evidence that gods and spirits are there. We argue that at the heart of such spiritual experiences is the concept of a porous boundary between mind and world, and that people in all human societies have conflicting intuitions about this boundary. (Luhrmann and Weisman 2022: 247)

In line with this and before starting the discussion, we have to concede, at least for the time being, that “all humans distinguish mind from world” (Luhrmann and Weisman 2022: 248).

The original context of this usage of porosity comes from Charles Taylor (2018), who engaged in the disenchantment/secularity debates, emphasizing the changes undergone by “conditions of belief” that have taken place in Western culture, especially in the last five centuries, even though he traces this back to at least the Gregorian reforms in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. In Taylor's view, the self has been shifting from a porous character towards a buffered and bounded one. Consequently, he observes a mutual weakening of positions in both belief and unbelief – if mainly understood as propositional knowledge, closely connected to the epistemic. The binary position-taking between *belief* and *unbelief* as epistemic choices concerning “truth claims” has shown limitations in providing “living options”, to use the vocabulary of William James (1897), whose pragmatism influences both Luhrmann and Taylor.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar way as Luhrmann has made use of Taylor's porosity, taking it from the sociohistorical construction of the “modern self” and applying it to the study of Theories of Mind (ToMs) and comparative phenomenology, I would like to explore porosity further, not only as a way to interpret the mind-world divide, but also to provide a conceptual framework of phenomenology and ToM. To do this, I propose to look into the nature of the “conflicting intuitions” (Luhrmann and Weisman 2022: 247) that exist regarding mind-

## 1

I will only address *porosity*, leaving aside some other crucial concepts Luhrmann develops, such as *absorption*, *paracosm* and many others that are crucial for a more thorough understanding of her work.

## 2

It is worth mentioning that James implicitly hints at an embodied notion of belief when he proposes the illusory stance humans take when trying to address belief using only propositional logic and ignoring the reasons of the “heart”, paraphrasing Pascal (James 1897).

world boundaries and dualisms and evaluate some divergences that have emerged in recent anthropological debates. I will draw on considerations regarding previous “turns” and paradigm shifts in anthropology, such as the *emic-etic* framework and use it as an analogy to explore some epistemological and ontological questions.

#### BATESONIAN METALOGUE: WHY DO THINGS HAVE OUTLINES?

Daughter: Daddy, why do things have outlines?

Father: Do they? I don't know. What sort of things do you mean?

D: I mean when I draw things, why do they have outlines?

F: Well, what about other sorts of things—a flock of sheep? or a conversation? Do they have outlines?

D: Don't be silly. I can't draw a conversation. I mean things. (Bateson 2000: 37)

The background from which we can start navigating epistemology, metaphysics and phenomenology is indebted to the work of Gregory Bateson and, even though I will not explicitly use much of his theoretical framework on this occasion, it is important to point out that it is still *in the background* (see Anton 2005; Bateson 2000; Bateson and Bateson 1988; Hoffmeyer 2008).<sup>3</sup> I want to explore the porosity of some “outlines” in the configurations of ToM besides the mind-world split, the outlines we set, for instance, between belief and experience or between the sensory and quasi-sensory.

In recent vernacular approaches to the phenomenology of the supernatural, “belief” by itself is not often seen as determinant of individual experiences as much as it used to be assumed (Bialecki 2014; Day 2017; Luhrmann and Weisman 2022).<sup>4</sup> Belief definitely plays a role in different local ToMs, but it does not map one-to-one with what people experience according to phenomenological reports (Luhrmann and Weisman 2022).

Alfred Korzybski's famous map and territory distinction presents us with a challenge to the idea of “correspondence” between the theoretical and the empirical (Korzybski 1995). In fact, the very usage of the word *overlap* is semantically misleading. I would like to suggest that an interpretation of mapping as *porous* can be helpful to think about some aspects of such intertwined relationships. Even though our phenomenal access to reality is processual, our formal and natural linguistic approaches are unavoidably discrete and seek

#### 3

Time can be a severe judge. Even though Bateson and the Palo Alto crew rushed to conclusions in their approach to schizophrenia and the current paradigm has luckily let mothers off the hook, that does not necessarily imply that the whole concept of the “double bind” should be discarded out of a feeling of contamination. I am using this example to illustrate the way I intend to rescue that Batesonian spirit and reframe it. I bring up the schizophrenia example in particular to start marinating the debate around the voice-hearing and reality shifting we will get into later on.

#### 4

I am not very comfortable with the usage of “supernatural” without a thorough sociohistorical assessment that makes clearer what we mean by it. When Aristotelian thought was integrated by medieval scholars like Thomas Aquinas, the previous Augustinian one-world view gave rise to more nuance than just natural and supernatural, e.g. there was also an in-between category, the preternatural (see Clarke 1994; Daston 1991). For the time being and following Luhrmann, I will stick to the less loaded term “anomalous”; for further discussion, see Luhrmann's “faith frame” in the first chapter of *How God Becomes Real* (2020b).

stabilisation (such as meanings, formulas, predictive scientific hypotheses, etc.). Such is the nature of communication. Incorporation of rather “formal” methods is also possible, and Luhrmann is a great example of this.

Context and complexity are important when it comes to formalisations. When formalisations function across various contexts, it complicates things for the methodologies of anthropology (Agar 2004). On the other hand, any approach, whatever its complexity and formalisations, must go through the recursive filter of “the map is not the territory” mantra, which for this paper I will try to keep in the background as a sort of prayer wheel.

Besides the inner-outer and mind-world thresholds, the concept of porosity can be of great value when approaching the semantic field that comprehends phenomenology, metaphysics, epistemology, and ontology. Failing to recognise the porous intertwining of concepts results in reduced reflexivity when practising comparative phenomenology. I have to say that I do not pretend to reinvent the wheel here. What I want to address is precisely of a processual, phenomenological and empirical nature: if the task is to discover warm water, this task requires porous recalibration every time one opens the tap, so to speak. The configuration of elements that follows intends to shed light on the need for this type of embodied reflexivity (Csordas 1990; Kalmykova 2011), exploring alternatives to propositional approaches to belief and “truth claims”.

Categorising experience is a complex affair. Friedrich Nietzsche famously pointed out that God is not dead after all, considering we are still constrained by grammar. So, in order to address *categorisation*, we have to take a “leap of faith”—if you’ll excuse the pun—to go beyond the propositional level and approach the *conflictive intuitions* through the lens of embodied cognition (Kalmykova 2011). Bateson hinted in this direction with the notions of “levels of abstraction”, or better yet, the “levels of learning” (2000). This basically entails that many of the phenomenological paradoxes behind *conflictive intuitions* are only paradoxical when addressed within one level. This conflictive aspect is exacerbated by the limitations of natural language and the Nietzschean “grammar” underlying our categorisation.

In his essay “Korzybski and Bateson: Paradoxes in the Consciousness of Abstracting”, Corey Anton points out: “if we confuse a class with its name, we obviously suffer from logical-typing errors. But the question remains: is it even possible for this to be thoroughly avoided? Doesn’t an unnamed category seem not to be a category at all? What, that is, would an unnamed category be a category of?” (2005: 407). The essays comprised in “Toward an Anthropological Theory of Mind” (Luhrmann et al. 2012) show that the categories, i.e. the outlines that are more salient in local ToMs, cannot be explained away, translated or mapped out without readjusting our own frame of reference. Some 4E approaches to cognitive science show the difficulty of realising intersubjective communication within the realm of propositional thinking alone (Kalmykova 2011).<sup>5</sup>

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The “Es” in 4E cognitive science stand for embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended. Some have proposed adding more “Es”, i.e. ecological, emotional, evolutionary, and consequently speak of 5E or 6E. As no consensus has been reached, for the time being, I’ll stick to the original formulation of “4E”.

To understand these attempts to taxonomize and cluster “categories” in novel ways, we can move beyond the apparently default Venn-diagram-like lens that seems to suggest clean and sharp outlines separating events.<sup>6</sup> We should also assume that, since whatever it is that we are trying to shed light on remains rather vague across contexts, and even locally (Spirits? Hallucinations? The transcendent? The numinous?), it necessarily has to be considered as *in transition between categories*, and that those categories might not even belong to the same “levels”. This is freshly exemplified in Luhrmann’s observation: no matter how quotidian charismatic evangelists may become with ‘their’ God, “they never ask him to feed the dog” (Luhrmann and Weisman 2022: 248).

“ANTHROPOLOGY, FOR ME, IS PHILOSOPHY  
WITH THE PEOPLE IN.” – TIM INGOLD

To continue down this line, we could consider some of the metaphysical assumptions we might project onto the map-territory (meta)metaphor, such as Euclidean and Cartesian formattings of perception and access. The same goes whenever we speak of “levels”; metaphors such as onion skins and Russian dolls should be taken with a grain of salt. Metaphysical questions don’t usually expect epistemic answers. Think of these as mental gymnastics (we will get to the embodied part, too). Let’s get started...

Is the mind a leaky organ as the philosopher and cognitive scientist Andy Clark suggested (1997: 53, in Ingold 2010: 12), or is it as Ingold proposes, the skull that leaks, and mind and things go through? (Ingold 2010: 12). What is it, exactly, which is porous or leaky? When we summon the map-territory metaphor, do we imagine the map on the inside, the outside, or more like an interface, and how does it relate to the territory? Can we use *porous mapping* to explore other related thresholds besides mind-world, theoretical and empirical, or phenomenology and metaphysics? Between ontology, culture and epistemology?<sup>7</sup> Can the idea/metaphor of porous mapping help us grasp or understand some (deeper?) intercategory grey areas better or differently, revealing specific biases and/or blind spots in our own local ToM?

Even though we are not paying a deep visit to metaphysical county, we must acknowledge the necessity of some incursions we will make. Alan Watts used to say in his characteristic tongue-in-cheek register that for every outside there is an inside, and for every inside there is an outside, and although they are different, they go together. There, he proposed, lies the ‘key’ to the ultimate metaphysical mysteries. Please note that this is not a dismissal of the value of metaphysics. On the contrary, it is about acknowledging their *place*, if you don’t mind the trope, while being careful as to the possible reification of these inclinations.

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For a now-classic assessment of the definitional problem in anthropology, see Goody (1961).

7

A philosopher who was kind enough to read and comment on this paper was a bit surprised by the categorical pairing of “culture” with “epistemology” and “ontology”. I pointed out that, in anthropology, the ontological debate takes place in a different arena than it does in philosophy, as one can appreciate in “Ontology Is Just Another Word for Culture: Motion Tabled at the 2008 Meeting of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory, University of Manchester” (Carrithers et al. 2010).

Irving Hallowell has argued that “any inner-outer dichotomy, with the human skin as boundary, is psychologically irrelevant” (1955: 88, in Ingold 2010:12). Recent empirical evidence supports this intuition, for example, in the specific case of auditory hallucinations, which in psychiatry were long considered a sign of schizophreniform disorders, and are now considered with more nuance, and identifying the source of the voice or voices inside or outside the skull is ceasing to be the main parameter for diagnosis (Copolov, Trauer and Mackinnon 2004). If we pretend we can “stay” within the realm of the psychological, Hallowell’s point is almost a truism that can even get metaphysical seals of approval both from “outer” Platonic and Kantian “inner” oriented perspectives. However, the psychological realm, whatever ontological status we may assign it, is intertwined with, well... pretty much everything else. In the next sections we will explore some of that intertwining, considering transdisciplinary advances in touch with 4E cognitive science in relation to the theoretical and methodological demands of the anthropological project.

“RELIGION IS NEVER MERELY METAPHYSICS.” – CLIFFORD GEERTZ

Keeping this warning *in mind*, there is much to be learned from the metaphysical transitions between the inner and the outer, though (Csordas 1990; Schilbrak 2004).<sup>8</sup> As could be expected, the emphasis lies rather on the ability to switch and reframe perspectives than on merely picking sides between the inner or the outer. This can be seen in processual and dynamic approaches to phenomenology, as in Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm (2004 [1968]) or Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory (2001, 2004). There is a lot to get from the *Gestalt* shift from figure and background and *vice versa*, from getting involved with the polarity itself rather than with the poles. On the other hand, by indulging the metaphysical hide-and-seek on a propositional level alone, one might end up with some sort of “variations on the chicken and the egg theme”, which we would like to avoid at all costs.

We put ourselves in quite a predicament when we assume that “belief” is to be the main ‘bridge’ between mind and world, with the phenomenological assistance of five clear-cut senses that connect an inside and an outside. When grappling with conceptualisation and truth claims within the frame of religious studies, researchers are often confronted with a few awkwardly justified choices: methodological atheism, theism, and agnosticism, which are essentially belief-centric.<sup>9</sup> Surely, belief “by itself” should not be ignored, but to better understand the conditions that frame it, we have to look at the Batesonian patterns that connect maps and territories and be ready to tap into other areas of embodied cognition.

8

Schilbrack, for instance, seeks “...to show the fruitfulness of connecting the study of ritual activities to the ritualists’ metaphysics, which is to say, to their understanding of the necessary conditions of life. [...] [S]ome rituals may be seen as inscribing bodies with messages that are, properly speaking, metaphysical in this sense, and that some rituals may be seen as embodied inquiries into the metaphysical nature of things” (2004: 77).

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See Droogers and Knibbe (2011) on the potential hardships on the researcher’s psyche of the alternative they propose, “methodological luddism”. That is the reason why I will advocate for the joint exploration of holistic practices that help researchers where the theoretical and the methodological fall short. More about this in the closing remarks.

It is in this sense that I think porosity as a metaphor has hidden potential: not just as a crucial ingredient in a ToM sandwich, caught between mind and world, but as a way of reorganising what we otherwise would merely see as *overlaps* and *intersections* between metaphysics, phenomenology, ontology, and epistemology. To do this, we could move towards the development of an *ecology of heuristics and practices* that contribute to the “comparative phenomenology” project. For this first approach, I scout theoretical and methodological frameworks for my research within the frame of the ERC project DEAGENCY, where I am currently starting to conduct fieldwork as a PhD student. I aim to study how people who practice alternative spiritualities in Slovenia – (neo)shamanism in particular – experience the dead as social agents. Through my fieldwork I expect to contribute toward an “ethnographically based philosophical anthropology” (Wentzer and Mattingly 2018: 145). I will present some experiences from my first incursions in the field in the next sections. Bringing in some autoethnographic field experience so far, I am getting more perspective on the porosity—or maybe the lack thereof – in my own ToM.<sup>10</sup>

“THOSE ARE MY PRINCIPLES, AND IF YOU DON’T LIKE THEM...  
WELL, I HAVE OTHERS.” – GROUCHO MARX

Over a century ago, J. G. Frazer wrote the preface to what would become the seminal ethnographic work of the discipline, Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, serving as a field guide for subsequent generations of anthropologists. In his introduction, Frazer primarily focused on the “relationship between magic and religion among the Trobrianders” (Frazer, in Malinowski 1932 [1922]: xiv), concluding that

[c]ontrary to the general attitude of savages towards the souls of the departed, they are reported to be almost completely devoid of any fear of ghosts. [...] This conspicuous predominance of magic over religion, at least over the worship of the dead, is a very notable feature in the culture of a people so comparatively high in the scale of savagery as the Trobriand Islanders. It furnishes a fresh proof of the extraordinary strength and tenacity of the hold which this world-wide delusion has had, and still has, upon the human mind. (Frazer, in Malinowski 1932 [1922]: xiv)

Today, more than a century after the publication of Malinowski’s ethnography, anthropologists, with varying degrees of openness, reflect on the progress made in abandoning concepts like the “scale of savagery” and actively engage in the ongoing recalibration of our instruments and assessment of our biases, striving for a well-curated reflexivity in our anthro-

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Throughout my previous fieldwork experiences in religious processions in Argentina and in my first incursions here in Slovenia, I have learned to identify some changes in the “flavours” of my porosity. For instance, even though I rather tend to remain an outsider when I come across “collective effervescence” in my fieldwork, nevertheless, the more I give in to the “participant” side of participant observation, the more I reconsider the nature of some perspectives I used to categorise as “belief”. Some embodied training, as well as some mildly “anomalous” experiences I have had, are helping me lower my guard and participate more fully, without feeling I am forcing it. In order to come to your senses, Alan Watts often said, you sometimes need to go out of your mind.

pological endeavours. This process was, in fact, catalysed by the publication of Malinowski's personal journal, which contributed to the *reflexive turn* in anthropology (Nazaruk 2011).

From this reflexive exercise, a new sense of cultural relativism emerged to address some flagrant ethnocentric biases. As Argyrou (2017) pointed out, the succession of "turns" that followed, and that "keep anthropology turning" can be seen as threaded by a throughline – George Stocking's ethnological problem – that struggles to find unity in the face of diversity. I will argue that the succession of *turns* into which the anthropological project delves are at the same time increasing in complexity and, as should be expected, so are the challenges to reflexivity.

The differences that were relevant to ethnographers a century ago are not the ones we find relevant now. The current quest for relevance aims at "levels" that are more deeply embodied and embedded, as in the study of ToMs. Naturally, after having addressed and digested (though only partially) some differences that suggest an underlying unity of humanity through previous turns, the discipline moves on to "deeper" and more complex challenges. Trying to make sense of the ontological turn, we question what we had so far considered *core principles*, paraphrasing Marx (Groucho)... Let's have a look at some "mapping" issues with regard to different aspects of embodied cognition, comparing the relevance of certain questions through the history of the discipline and the conceptualisation challenges that emerge from such questions.

Take, for example, the emic-etic distinction. The level of reflexivity it revealed in its original linguistic context of phonetics was rather naïve. Don't get me wrong, it was a powerful systematisation, but only illustrative of an aspect of reality that is easily affordable through conventional taxonomy. Bilingual people, for example, can easily grasp the fact that certain sounds exist for a community of speakers and make a fundamental difference to them, while making none at all to speakers of another language community. As Michael Agar put it: "In Spanish, a speaker may hear 'vaca' and 'baca' as the same word. An English speaker would never confuse 'van' and 'ban'" (Agar 2005: 3.3). Phonemics, "emic" sounds, are the sounds a community of speakers use and understand as "*a difference that makes a difference*", in Batesonian terms (Agar 2005: 8.6, italics are his). On the other hand, phonetics are potentially all the sounds the human body can make, and this already implies a physiological constraint, and within it there is also the constraint of practicality; empirical research in phonetics has not found evidence of *all possible sounds* being actually used.

So far, things don't get out of hand; these variables can be quantified and compared, are "out in the open", so to speak. And while they might be complicated to measure and analyse, their complexity does not exceed our understanding. When Pike (1967) borrowed the distinction and tried to bridge an epistemological conundrum with a methodological device, some important changes occurred. Notice that at the phonetic level there is basically no need for porosity: the map is still not the territory, yet the relationship between *phonetic* and *phonemic* can be subject to traditional taxonomizing and set theory.<sup>11</sup> I don't object to a good old Venn diagram or Excel sheet in such scenarios. There is enough consent

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This can be replicated in machines, such as synthesizers, and, even though it works, the results far from resemble the sonic quality of natural language with its prosodic subtleties and other details.



– never mind minor idiosyncratic discrepancies – about the intelligibility and reliance of map-territory relationships in cases like Agar’s “vaca-baca” and “van-ban” (2005), and there is not much wiggle room for surprises. You can almost feel the rubber meeting the road.

When we borrow the original emic-etic distinction and apply it to other areas such as social behaviour as Pike did (Agar 2005), the jump is sometimes “exponential”. What this implies is that map-territory relationships need to be revised *ad hoc*. Let’s focus on a couple of phenomenological differences we find when shifting levels of abstraction from phonetics to semantics. Take “voiced bilabial nasal”, for instance. It might be hard for the non-linguist to become familiar with such jargon, nevertheless, once we agree on it, intersubjective consensus is that “voiced bilabial nasal” *univocally* refers to the sound the letter “m” makes, [m].

Now, allow me to propose an experiment of the kind Tim Ingold (2007) sometimes employs. Hold [m] in mind. You may probably go [mmmmm] and you can almost hear it. You don’t hear it with your ears, yet you hear it, and in most cases, you can tell the difference. Nevertheless, there is a lot of shared circuitry that has been repurposed from your “real” hearing, related to the senses and coming through your ears from the “outside”, to the auditory images that can arise from the “inside”. Try it again, hold [m] in mind for some time and stop reading until you are done. [mmmmm].

See if it affected how you perceive and/or adjust the flow of air through your nostrils, the position of your tongue and lips. If you think it hasn’t, do it again, this time with your mouth wide open. [mmmmmmmm]... Notice any changes? Before you quit reading, feeling that you are suddenly in a weird yoga class, let me expand on this with a point made by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson: “On the general goal of human cognition, we have nothing better to offer than rather trivial speculative remarks. However, these remarks have important and non-trivial consequences” (2001: 47). I hope the upcoming remarks will show how these phenomenological self-assessment exercises may have illuminating consequences in the ways we understand map-territory relationships.

We agree with Sperber and Wilson (2001) on the fact that the “shared economy” of cognition implies that optimisation and efficiency constraints demand the exaptation of some preexisting features which now fulfil a new function – and in most cases remain engaged in trade-off relationships with the original function(s) (Anderson 2007). Agnati et al. (2013) show that there is a sort of incessant “tinkering” between perception and modelling, senses and imagination. These studies show that abstract planning can stimulate motor areas, even when the planned task doesn’t inherently involve motor activity, which sheds light on the [m] experiment we just saw.

To continue exploring this, let’s put together a couple of “meaningless” phonemes: [m] and [i]. We might interpret the English word “me”. Following William James’ definition, the “me” is the self as an object of knowledge (1890). Attempting to explore this “me” immediately requires an almost impossible perspective: how to define oneself, not to mention how to put it into words. What *comes to mind* when you summon “me” is anything but simple.

This simple example points out how mental “images” are entangled in ways that challenge hierarchical framings and taxonomical approaches. The distance between elements

is *so close and yet so far*, as it is related to their contextual relevance, and hence constantly readjusting (Sperber and Wilson 2001; 2004). In this scenario, porosity is a better ally for grasping these phenomena than the “bounded” imagery of “outlines”.

Let’s have a look at one more example, getting back to Theories of Mind (ToMs). This one will show how phenomenologically different it is to focus on abstract thought than it is to focus on [m]. According to Parkinson and Wheatley, “convergent evidence from behavior, neuropsychology, and neuroimaging suggest that humans use knowledge about space to scaffold mental representations of abstract information” in an article where they explicitly address social cognition (2013: 5). Other studies point at the influence ToMs have on how we process physical metaphors differently than mental metaphors (Canal et al. 2022).

Take a moment to reflect on this: how do you hold in mind abstractions such as “phenomenology” or “metaphysics”? That is, what is the phenomenology underlying your notion of phenomenology? You certainly don’t summon *verbatim* a “canonical” definition every time you call it up. Even if you could, which definition would you go by? What are the placeholders you use instead? *Where do you put them?* Further evidence points to the fact that we have the vague notion of holding something in mind, but the “place” we assign it is pre-categorical and more consistent to our own scrutiny than the concept itself (Pylyshyn 1989). William James already hinted in this direction in *The Will to Believe* (James 1897) by pointing out the impossibility of holding in mind one’s entire worldview in an instant, without incurring in inconsistencies.

Canonical definitions state that “phenomenology” or “metaphysics” are *subsets, branches* of philosophy – though “rhizomatic thinkers” rightly would disagree. Take this observation made by John Vervaeke and John Kennedy (2004: 223): “Our tendency to map spatial relations onto other domains extends beyond metaphor to the use of graphs and diagrams to represent all forms of information.” Spatial/topological framings are crucial for navigating these levels of abstraction (Parkinson and Wheatley 2013), and in cognitive science models we often define arrangements such as the *intersection/overlap* between a *vertical Russian doll elaboration* and a *horizontal mosaic organisation* (Agnati et al. 2013).

My question is, to what extent are we subjected to our “grammar” in a broad Nietzschean sense: the spatial representations that are manifested in our language and our phenomenological experience as well, entangled through embodied cognition, though not necessarily *overlapping* (for further discussion, see: Lakoff and Johnson 2008; Vervaeke and Kennedy 2004). To what extent do we “know” that the central nervous system is not *really* like a Russian doll? What biases and blinds spots do *we*<sup>12</sup> have from having learned only Euclidean geometry and Aristotelian/Cartesian logic in our early schooling? In which ways can porosity help us develop different mapping skills?

What does “reflexivity” look like at this level? As Michael Agar put it, “we have met the other and we’re all nonlinear” (2004). How do others experience what we articulate as vertical Russian dolls intersecting horizontal mosaics? Take Geertz’s example of Indonesian

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The “we” I am referring to falls under very contested categories, namely “Western society” and “modernity”.

phenomenology where “*Rasa* [concept influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism] has two primary meanings: ‘feeling’ and ‘meaning.’” (1973: 134). Note that *rasa* is actually not so alien to Western ToMs: the English word “sense”, as in the five senses, is linked to “feeling”, while “making sense” is associated with “meaning”.

Perhaps this could be porously mapped with the Hindu-Buddhist notion of a “sixth sense”, encompassing introspection, mind, proprioception, and metacognition as aspects of *āyatana* and *manovijñāna* in Buddhism and *manah shashthan indriyani* in Hinduism, which is also likened to a sense in the Bhagavad-gita (15.7). It is noteworthy as a playful observation that Night Shyamalan, the writer and director of *The Sixth Sense* – the go-to movie when it comes to the agency of the dead – was raised Hindu. Spoiler alert, the very plot of the movie and the constraints of Hollywood narratives required Shyamalan to be bluntly literal about “seeing” dead people. Until the climax of the movie, the spectator cannot phenomenologically tell apart the world of the living from the world of the dead, and who belongs where.

In my first participant-observation experiences with shamanic practitioners, I am self-assessing my own “porosity” and capacity for “absorption”. I realise that, even when I cannot help but to be sceptical about “truth claims” my interlocutors put forward to backup certain experiences, I have developed a minimum amount of ontological and epistemological flexibility that allows for a less forced integration of my interlocutors’ perspectives. I also realise that this “hermeneutical bridge” largely has to do with some extracurricular and very much embodied practices I have engaged with throughout my life. If it wasn’t for the years I dedicated to certain meditation and contemplation practices, I would have more difficulty housing such perspectives. Surely enough, curricular endeavours also did their share, but I am convinced that one cannot grasp much of worth just by *talking the hypothetical talk*. At this point, the anthropological project I signed up for also requires at least a bit of *walking the walk*. I am looking forward to expanding on this in the future.

#### CLOSING REMARKS

When we use a certain kind of “mapping,” like the emic-etic example in its original phonetic context, it can be assigned a certain kind of porosity in the map-territory relationship. Some things can still be approached in a rather Cartesian manner, others cannot. Hence, when we “exapt” the emic-etic or any other framework to help us “map” other phenomena, we need to be aware of the constraints of the new contexts. The nature of the human repertoire of sounds systematised by phonetics has certain constraints, it has clear taxonomical outlines and an approachable variability, accessible on the “surface” level. Moreover, it is phenomenologically perceived differently from abstract philosophical concepts: holding [m] in mind is not the same as calling up “me”, and certainly it has a whole other flavour than summoning constructs such as “the relationship between metaphysics and spirituality”.

It is hard to tell how porous porosity should or could be, but it will always be context-dependent. Cybernetically informed approaches like the ones of Agar (2003, 2004, 2005), Bateson (2000) and Sperber and Wilson (2001, 2004) can hold a transdisciplinary dialogue

while not trying to “explain away” the human condition, as some anthropologists and philosophers fear may happen with the expansion of cognitive science to “domains” such as the metaphysical and spiritual (Wentzer and Mattingly 2018). According to Eriksen, “what is needed from anthropology now is not rejection through dialectical negation, but better answers to the questions raised by [Steven] Pinker and his allies [the bio-evolutionary cog-sci crew]” (2007: 242). Many scholars also fear a further bifurcation pointing out the need to “protect the field from absorption into cultural studies or annihilation owing to the rising hegemony of naturalism and cognitive science” (Wentzer and Mattingly 2018: 145). I understand the concern, but it’s not an *either/or* dilemma. As Eriksen points out, those questions need to be addressed. Luhrmann and fellow researchers are bridging some of these fundamental gaps, bringing fresh air and crucial transdisciplinary dialogue.

We can get a bird’s eye perspective of the mapping that takes place in phonetics, we can almost visualise it as the overlap between two flat levels, emic-etic, Venn diagram. How *high* would we have to fly or how *deep* would we have to go to have a glimpse of our own emic mind map, the muddle inside our very own local ToM? It seems clear that when it comes to ontological questions, the idea of etic conceptualisation is illusory and our emic perspective in dialogue with other emic perspectives is the best we can aspire to. Which is a lot already. Nevertheless, this shouldn’t necessarily lead to uncontained epistemological relativism.

Mostowlansky and Rota point out that “Geertz’s work on religion has provided essential resources to move this discipline away from its original phenomenological concerns with the nature and manifestations of a distinct sacred reality to framing religion as a social and cultural domain of human thought and activity” (2023 [2020]: 9). I don’t see these two perspectives as incompatible – there is a lot of richness in the transdisciplinary dialogue that has been taking place between anthropology, religious studies, and embodied cognition, to mention some of the disciplines involved in this project (Kalmykova 2011).

As Argyrou suggested, the anthropological problem has been trying to “demonstrate that although different, others are people like us, that their otherness is both different – for it must be taken seriously and not simply explained away – and the same at the same time.” (2017: 51). Each of the “turns” in anthropology presented certain reflexivity challenges and, following a Batesonian approach, I believe that the patterns at play at each turn are embedded in different levels of abstraction and address shifting levels of complexity that require a continuous readjustment of our framework. The methods and theories will change for sure, and so should our embodied response and the phenomenological heuristics needed for reassessing our biases.

Linguists developed the right hearing/listening skills and deployed the analytics needed to code the phonetic system. We cannot separate the whole heuristic that emerged from that process and apply it elsewhere, expecting *ceteris paribus*. It is not only the phenomenological approach, or theoretical-methodological mapping considerations, we also have to foster a paradigm of embodied cognition (Csordas 1990) that enables us to address not just the questions coming from the ontological turn in anthropology, but also those from neighbouring disciplines, recovering the capacity for dialogue and growth. Embodied training should become part of the curricula, developing “peer reviewed” heuristics and

communities to further explore “comparative phenomenology” and to prevent the dangers of jumping headfirst into methodologies that might demand too much from our psyche (Droogers and Knibbe 2011).

As Eriksen (2007) suggests, we cannot afford to ignore the questions coming from evolutionary perspectives and cognitive science. Wentzer and Mattingly (2018) fear that we need to respond to many fronts that threaten the study of the human condition: a whole spectrum ranging from the push to explain it away on the one hand – Taylor’s exclusive humanism (2018) – and some versions of posthumanism and transhumanism on the other.

Siloed academicism can be cured with well calibrated transdisciplinary porosity in a way that improves intelligibility across fields, avoids a lethargic embrace of the subject of study, and prevents mechanical reductionisms while recognising lessons learned from previous paradigms and “turns” (Argyrou 2017). The discipline is still dealing with hermeneutic hang-ups when it comes to “bringing back” the lessons we try to learn from engaging our interlocutors. How did we get them? What got lost in translation? Where do we put it? All of those questions require a “philosophy with the people in”, and transdisciplinary empirical research like the one Luhrmann is carrying out is a good standard to pursue.

There are several other aspects of Luhrmann’s work that I consider worth addressing, and I kindly invite you to reach out and discuss any related issues that might be relevant, either just for some friendly brainstorming, or even as a possible future collaboration.

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## POVZETEK

Avtor v prispevku raziskuje nekatere metodološke in teoretične perspektive ,poroznosti' v odnosu do ,anomalnih' oziroma ,nadnaravnih' pojavov, natančneje interakcije z duhovi in bogovi. Izhajajoč iz koncepta ,poroznosti jaza' Charlesa Taylorja, se je Luhrmann s svojo delovno skupino lotila testiranja hipoteze, da je poroznost, razumljena kot metaforična opredelitev meje med umom in svetom, ključ do spoznanja tistega, kar je drugače sprejeto kot nadnaravno ali vsaj anomalno. Po tej teoriji – z besedami Tanye Marie Luhrmann, teoriji uma (ToM; *Theory of Mind*) – je jaz z bolj utrjeno mejo med umom in svetom, manj dovzeten za integriranje anomalnih izkušenj, na primer boga ali duha, kot tisti s ,porozno' konfiguracijo.

Luhrmann trdi, da je fundamentalni dualizem um-svet prisoten v vseh človeških izkušnjah in kulturah; ljudje tako ali drugače postavimo ločnico med notranjim in zunanjim. Načine, kako se to zgodi, Luhrmann imenuje lokalne teorije uma. V zahodni kulturi konfiguracija te mejnice po navadi daje prednost ,utrjenim' vidikom jaza kot ,poroznim', kar vodi do rigidnejših dualizmov in monadičnega dojemanja jaza. To ne vpliva le na možnosti duhovne izkušnje, temveč tudi oblikuje naš svetovni nazor ter zaznamuje znanost na splošno in še posebej antropologijo, glede na izzive refleksivnosti.

Avtor, sledeč transdisciplinarnemu duhu raziskave T. M. Luhrmann in njeni »primerjalni fenomenologiji«, pristopa k poroznosti na transdisciplinarni način in ga uporablja za naslavljanje nekaterih izzivov refleksivnosti po ontološkem obratu v antropologiji. Razisku-

je različne mogoče pomene metafore ‚poroznosti‘ in predlaga različne heuristike, ki jih lahko vernakularni raziskovalec uporabi pri ugotavljanju meja ‚ontološke prožnosti‘.

Poleg tega avtor izpostavlja potrebo po poroznosti v transdisciplinarnem dialogu pri ponovnem proučevanju nekaterih pretežno zahodnih oblik dualizmov, na primer kartezi-janstva, s širše disciplinarne perspektive. Raziskovanje recipročnih odnosov med metafo-rami, kot je ‚poroznost‘, in teorijami uma lahko pomaga premostiti nekatere disciplinarne vrzeli, da bi dosegli bolj razumljiv in manj izoliran konceptualni tok. Prav tako lahko razbli-ni nekatere slepe pege in predsodke, s katerimi se potencialno sooča antropološki projekt, in nam pomaga izogniti se mrtvim točkam. Članek izpostavlja potrebo po dialogu in razvoju »recenziranih« utelešenih praks, brez katerih podcenjujemo svoje zmožnosti uvida.