Religion in Flux 2: Theory and Methodology /
Religija v toku 2: teorija in metodologija

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Svetovi Worlds

**Religion in Flux 2:
Theory and Methodology**

**Religija v toku 2: teorija
in metodologija**

Content / Vsebina

BOOK REVIEWS / KNJIŽNE OCENE

REPORTS / POROČILA

Editorial

Michal Uhrin and Manca Račič

The study of religion is one of the oldest areas of research in the social sciences and humanities. Sociocultural anthropology and ethnology are interwoven with the study of religion, myth, magic and ritual. Many classical authors such as James George Frazer, Émile Durkheim, Victor Turner and Mary Douglas have conceived theories that have attempted to explain many dimensions of religion and religiosity. The ideas of the doyens of sociocultural anthropology and ethnology, though perhaps considered outdated in some respects, still offer an inexhaustible well of inspiration for contemporary scholars, as reflected in some of the studies in this issue. The previous issue of *Svetovi / Worlds*, RELIGION IN FLUX 1: RESEARCH STRATEGIES, was composed of papers based on various types of empirical data, ethnographic or historical, etc., related to the Central European context (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary), which illustrate the stimulating theoretical and methodological diversity in contemporary empirical research on religion. As the studies in the first issue demonstrate, different methods might help to reveal distinct aspects of religion and its role in people's lives. The second issue, RELIGION IN FLUX 2: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY, brings together a stimulating array of articles that broadly reflect the current theoretical and methodological issues in research on religion.

In the first article, "Making Porosity More Porous: An Open Call for Brainstorming After Tanya Luhrmann's Recent Findings", Juan Esteban De Jager explores the theoretical and methodological potential of "porosity" in understanding the "supernatural", particularly in interactions with spirits and gods, and investigates the potential of porosity in addressing reflexivity challenges and phenomenological ones, while advocating for a more porous transdisciplinary communication. The author shares the transdisciplinary spirit of Tanya Luhrmann's research and its "comparative phenomenology", therefore he approaches porosity in a dialogical way, using it to address some reflexivity challenges after the ontological turn. In his paper, De Jager examines diverse interpretations of the concept of "porosity" and assesses the challenges of comparative phenomenology and Theory of Mind, while revisiting some transdisciplinary intertwinements of past and present anthropology. Finally, he concludes that exploring the intertwined relationship between metaphors such as "po-

rosity" and Theories of Mind can help bridge some disciplinary gaps and strive toward a more intelligible and less buffered conceptual flow. He concludes that such an approach can also shed light on certain blind spots the anthropological project might be facing, and prevents researchers from walking into dead ends. De Jager provides an interesting and innovative perspective on issues that are of constant relevance in the social sciences and humanities.

Andrej Kapcar addresses the rise that has occurred in recent decades in the interest in esotericism and magical practice in "Pop Spirituality: The Application of Popular Culture in Contemporary Esoteric Practices". Kapcar's paper focuses on the mutual interaction between occult knowledge represented through visual means in popular culture and the magical practice of modern mages. Kapcar observes that magical practices have undergone significant changes in the past decades, with a main shift towards accessibility and individuality. With the rise in popularity of individual, custom-designed magical rituals, popular culture has proven to be one of the most important aspects associated with the new practice. New schools of magic, Kapcar argues, such as the influential *Chaos Magick*, have proven to be fertile ground for these innovative practices. He concludes that the interconnection between modern magical practice and popular culture as its medium is probably not going anywhere anytime soon. Kapcar's paper addresses the impact of new media and its interplay with religion and thus speaks to one of the latest research topics in the field.

The third paper, "Cognitive and Evolutionary Inspirations in the Study of Religion with Emphasis on the Development of Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology in Slovakia" by Michal Uhrin, provides a basic overview of the fundamental concepts from the first wave of the cognitive and evolutionary science of religion. It focuses on selected scholars whose works and ideas are considered pivotal in the development of this field. Although such an approach may entail the risk of omitting specific papers, books, or research, it aims to highlight the broader general trends in the development of the cognitive and evolutionary science of religion by using specific research interests as examples. The second objective of the paper is to outline how cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion have been reflected in ethnology and sociocultural anthropology in Slovakia. Cognitive and evolutionary approaches do not form the dominant trends in ethnology and anthropology either abroad or in Slovakia. Nevertheless, Uhrin argues, they have captured the attention of a narrow group of scholars who apply them to a diverse range of topics.

The final article, "Malinowski's Formative Contribution to American Folklore Studies" by Frank J. Korom, addresses the influence that Malinowski had on the development of modern performance studies in the United States among folklore scholars. More precisely, it focuses on Malinowski's writings concerning the language of myth and magic; according to Korom, these were the aspects of his work that appealed most to American scholars of performance in the 1970s. Korom concludes that folklorists have moved far beyond Malinowski's simplistic functionalism, but are indebted to his attempt to bridge the chasm between text and context. Korom's paper illustrates that the classic works of socio-cultural anthropology, such as those of B. K. Malinowski, can be a great inspiration even for contemporary research and are highly worth revisiting.

Since the publication of classic anthropological, psychological or sociological works in the study of religion, there have been several fundamental changes in the theoretical and methodological aspects of research. Some ideas from these works have been discarded, others have been rethought and transformed, and still others are being rediscovered. We believe that classic works can also provide inspiring ideas and suggestions for research on religion to researchers in the contemporary world. This assertion is illustrated by a few of the articles in this issue. The reflections of some authors begin with the thoughts of the "founding fathers and mothers" of various scholarly disciplines. The editors believe that reflecting on theoretical and methodological diversity is a fundamental part of academic research regardless of the academic discipline or field of research. The contributors in this issue of *Svetovi / Worlds* uniformly show that diversity in theoretical approaches and methodological toolkits is a typical characteristic of the study of religion.

The double issue of *Svetovi* 2024 brings readers up-to-date empirical findings and analyses, as well as theoretical and methodological reflections in the research on religion in contemporary society.

We hope you will find it to be a thought-provoking read.

Uvodnik

Manca Račič in Michal Uhrin

Religija je eno najstarejših področij raziskovanja v družboslovju in humanistiki. Sociokulturna antropologija in etnologija sta prepleteni s študijem religije, mitov, magije in ritualov. Mnogi klasični avtorji, kot so James George Frazer, Émile Durkheim, Victor Turner in Mary Douglas, so zasnovali teorije, ki so poskušale razložiti številne razsežnosti vere in religioznosti. Ideje doajenov sociokulturne antropologije in etnologije, čeprav morda v nekaterih pogledih zastarele, še vedno ponujajo neizčrpen vir navdiha za sodobne znanstvenike, kot se odraža v nekaterih študijah v tej številki. Prejšnja številka revije *Svetov/Worlds*, RELIGIJA V TOKU 1: RAZISKOVALNE STRATEGIJE, je sestavljena iz prispevkov, ki temeljijo na različnih vrstah empiričnih podatkov, etnografskih ali zgodovinskih, povezanih s srednjeevropskim kontekstom (Češka, Slovaška, Madžarska), in ilustrirajo pestrost sodobnih empiričnih raziskav religije. Kot kažejo študije v prvi številki, lahko različne metode pomagajo razkriti različne vidike vere in njene vloge v življenju ljudi.

Druga številka, RELIGIJA V TOKU 2: TEORIJA IN METODOLOGIJA, združuje članke, ki odsevajo aktualna teoretična in metodološka vprašanja v raziskovanju religije. V prvi študiji, »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), Juan Esteban De Jager raziskuje teoretični in metodološki potencial »poroznosti« pri razumevanju »nadnaravnega«, zlasti v interakcijah z duhovi in bogovi in pri obravnavanju refleksivnih in fenomenoloških vidikov, hkrati pa zagovarja tudi bolj porozno transdisciplinarno komunikacijo. Avtor podpira transdisciplinarni vidik raziskovanja Tanye Luhrmann v njeni »primerjalni fenomenologiji«. K poroznosti pristopa na dialoški način. V svojem prispevku De Jager proučuje različne interpretacije koncepta »poroznosti« ter ocenjuje izzive primerjalne fenomenologije in teorije uma, pri tem pa ponovno pregleduje nekatere transdisciplinarne prepletenosti pretekle in sedanje antropologije. Sklene, da lahko raziskovanje prepletenega odnosa med metaforami, kot je »poroznost«, in teorijami uma pomaga premostiti nekatere discipli-

narne vrzeli. Ugotavlja, da lahko tak pristop osvetli tudi nekatere slepe točke, s katerimi se morda sooča antropološki projekt, in prepreči, da bi raziskovalci zašli v slepo ulico. De Jagerjeva študija ponuja zanimiv in inovativen pogled na vprašanja, ki so v družboslovju in humanistiki vedno pomembna.

Andrej Kapcar v članku »Pop Spirituality: The Application of Popular Culture in Contemporary Esoteric Practices« (Pop spiritulnost: uporaba popularne kulture v sodobnih ezoteričnih praksah) obravnava porast zanimanja za ezoteriko in magične prakse v zadnjih desetletjih. Osredotoča se na interakcijo med okultnim znanjem, predstavljenim z vizualnimi sredstvi v popularni kulturi, in magično prakso sodobnih magov. Kapcar opaža, da so magične prakse v zadnjih desetletjih doživele pomembne spremembe, pri čemer gre predvsem za premik k dostopnosti in individualnosti. Z naraščanjem priljubljenosti individualnih, po meri oblikovanih magičnih ritualov se je popularna kultura izkazala za enega najpomembnejših vidikov. Kapcar trdi, da so se nove šole magije, kot je vplivna Chaos Magick, pokazale kot plodna tla za inovativne prakse. Avtor sklene, da povezava med sodobno magično prakso in popularno kulturo kot njenim medijem verjetno ne bo tako kmalu izginila. Študija obravnava vpliv novih medijev in njihovo prepletenost z religijo ter tako odpira eno najnovejših raziskovalnih tem.

Članek Michala Uhrina »Cognitive and Evolutionary Inspirations in the Study of Religion with Emphasis on the Development of Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology in Slovakia« (Spoznavni in evolucijski navdihi pri študiju religije s poudarkom na razvoju etnologije in sociokulturne antropologije na Slovaškem) podaja osnovni pregled temeljnih konceptov iz prvega vala kognitivne in evolucijske znanosti o religiji. Osredotoča se na izbrane učenjake, katerih dela in ideje veljajo za ključne pri razvoju tega področja. Čeprav lahko takšen pristop tvega izpustitev določenih dokumentov, knjig ali raziskav, je njegov namen izpostaviti širše splošne trende v razvoju kognitivne in evolucijske znanosti o religiji z uporabo posebnih raziskovalnih interesov. Drugi cilj prispevka je orisati, kako so se kognitivne in evolucijske teorije religije odražale v etnologiji in sociokulturni antropologiji na Slovaškem. Kognitivni in evolucijski pristopi ne tvorijo prevladujočih trendov v etnologiji in antropologiji ne v tujini ne na Slovaškem. Kljub temu avtor trdi, da so pritegnili pozornost ozke skupine učenjakov, ki jih uporabljajo za raznoliko paleto raziskovalnih tem.

Zadnji prispevek »Malinowski's Formative Contribution to American Folklore Studies« (Formativni prispevek Malinowskega k ameriški folkloristiki) avtorja Franka J. Koroma, obravnava vpliv, ki ga je imel Malinowski na razvoj sodobnih raziskav performansa med folkloristi v Združenih državah Amerike. Natančneje, Korom se osredotoča na pisanje Malinowskega o jeziku mita in magije, saj so bili po njegovem mnenju to vidiki njegovega dela, ki so najbolj pritegnili ameriške proučevalce performansa v sedemdesetih letih 20. stoletja. Ugotavlja, da so folkloristi daleč presegli poenostavljeni funkcionalizem Malinowskega, vendar so hvaležni njegovemu poskusu premostitve prepada med besedilom in kontekstom. Koromov prispevek ponazarja, da so dela klasikov sociokulturne antropologije, kot je B. K. Malinowski, lahko velik navdih tudi za sodobno raziskovanje in so več kot vredna ponovnega premisleka.

Od izida klasičnih antropoloških, psiholoških ali socioloških del na področju preučevanja religije je prišlo do več temeljnih sprememb v teoretičnih in metodoloških vidikih raziskovanja. Nekatere ideje iz teh del so bile zavržene, druge so bile premišljene in preoblikovane, tretje pa so ponovno odkrite. Urednika verjameva, da lahko tudi klasična dela doprinesejo raziskovalcem v sodobnem svetu navdihujoče ideje in predloge za raziskovanje religije. To trditev potrjuje tudi kar nekaj prispevkov v tej številki - nenazadnje že s tem, ko avtorji v uvodnikih tlakujejo lastne znanstvene prispevke s sklicevanjem na dela in zapise "ustanoviteljev" različnih znanstvenih disciplin. Meniva, da je premislek o teoretskih in metodoloških raznolikostih temeljni del akademskega raziskovanja, ne glede na akademsko disciplino ali področje raziskovanja. Soustvarjalci pa s svojimi znanstvenimi izdelki dokazujejo, da sta raznolikost teoretičnih pristopov in uporabe metodoloških orodij (še vedno) ključna v sodobnem preučevanju religije.

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

Juan Esteban de Jager

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

INTRODUCTION

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).[1] 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 11th 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.[2]

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-

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[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).

Vol. 2, Nr. 2, July 2024

15

Juan Esteban de Jager
Making Porosity More Porous:
An Open Call for Brainstorming After
Tanya Luhrmann's Recent Findings

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).[3] 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).[4] 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

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[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 marinading 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 intertwinement 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).[5]

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[5] 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.[6] 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?[7] Can the idea/metaphor of porous mapping help us grasp or understand some (deeper?) intercategorical 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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[6]
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).[8] 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.[9] 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.

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[8] Schilbrak, 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).

[9] 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.[10]

> "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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[10] 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 phon*etic* and phon*emic* can be subject to traditional taxonomizing and set theory.[11] I don't object to a good old Venn diagram or Excel sheet in such scenarios. There is enough consent

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11

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.

Juan Esteban de Jager
Making Porosity More Porous:
An Open Call for Brainstorming After
Tanya Luhrmann's Recent Findings

– 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. [mmmmmm].

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*[12] 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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[12] The "we" I am referring to falls under very contested categories, namely "Western society" and "modernity".

Vol. 2, Nr. 2, July 2024

23

Juan Esteban de Jager
*Making Porosity More Porous:
An Open Call for Brainstorming After
Tanya Luhrmann's Recent Findings*

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 *manovijnana* 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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Juan Esteban de Jager
Making Porosity More Porous:
An Open Call for Brainstorming After
Tanya Luhrmann's Recent Findings

Vol. 2, Nr. 2, July 2024   27

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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 hevristike, 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 kartezijanstva, s širše disciplinarne perspektive. Raziskovanje recipročnih odnosov med metaforami, 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 razblini 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.

Juan Esteban de Jager
Making Porosity More Porous:
An Open Call for Brainstorming After
Tanya Luhrmann's Recent Findings

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29

Pop Spirituality: The Application of Popular Culture in Contemporary Esoteric Practices

Pop spiritualnost: uporaba popularne kulture
v sodobnih ezoteričnih praksah

Andrej Kapcar

ABSTRACT

Magical practices have undergone significant changes in the past decades, shifting towards accessibility and individuality. With the rise in popularity of individual, custom-designed magical rituals, popular culture has proven to be one of the important aspects associated with the new practice. Influential, reaching a wide audience, with a strong focus on immersive visual aspects, it is of no surprise that practitioners have started to include pop-cultural elements into their rituals. New schools of magic, such as the influential Chaos Magick, have proven to be a fertile ground for these innovative practices. This paper will focus on the mutual interaction between occult knowledge represented through visual means in popular culture and the magical practice of modern mages.

KEYWORDS: esotericism, magic, pop culture, subculture, aesthetics, occult

IZVLEČEK

V zadnjih desetletjih je v magičnih praksah prišlo do pomembnih sprememb, saj so se usmerile k dostopnosti in individualnosti. Z naraščanjem priljubljenosti individualnih, po meri oblikovanih magičnih ritualov se je popularna kultura izkazala za enega od pomembnih vidikov, povezanih z novo prakso. Zaradi njenega vpliva, širokega občinstva in močne osredotočenosti na vizualno, ki občinstvu omogočajo potopitev v fiktivni svet, ni presenetljivo, da so praktiki v svoje obrede začeli vključevati elemente iz popularne kulture. Nove šole magije, na primer vplivna skupina Chaos Magick, so se izkazale za plodna tla za te inovativne prakse. Članek se bo osredotočil na interakcijo med okultnim znanjem, predstavljenim z vizualnimi sredstvi v popularni kulturi, in magično prakso sodobnih magov.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: ezoteričnost, magija, popularna kultura, subkultura, estetika, okultno

INTRODUCTION

Popular culture has taken a lot of inspiration from magical practice, from the environments, skills and professions, to practices and beliefs. Topics often associated with magical practice, such as wizards, witches, spellcasters, thaumaturges, spells, curses, or rituals are abundantly represented in popular culture, and for most people outside of the active esoteric milieu, are predominantly connected with these works of fiction. However, these artistic representations are often based on historical esoteric writings, authentic rituals, or established beliefs.

Popular culture itself has for a long time been disregarded as a subject "unworthy" of academic, but also artistic interest. Often pejoratively described as "low art" to emphasize its separation from the more established forms of art and entertainment, such as painting, sculpture, theatre, or opera, associated with the opposite term of "high art" (or fine art), for a long time popular culture was overlooked, or even shunned and ridiculed (Danesi 2018: 6). However, not that long ago, this status quo started to change. With the emergence of pop art in the 1950s (Livingstone 2000: 4), the line between high and low art was becoming blurrier. Mirroring the change of opinion in the art scene, the academic community was also slowly adapting its previously negative outlook on popular culture. With several authors already acknowledging the important role popular culture has played in art theory (Crothers 2010: 31; Kececi 2015: 419), health (Kendal and Diug 2017: 9; Zimmerman and Mason 2017: 55), education (Kos-Lajtman and Slunjski 2017: 74; Seko and Kikuchi 2021: 358), or cultural transmission (Cohn, Taylor-Weiner and Grossman 2012: 1; Darling-Wolf 2015: 101; Leung et al. 2014: 143) we compared panels from American and Japanese comics to explore cross-cultural cognition beyond behavioral experimentation by looking at the expressive mediums produced by individuals from these cultures. This study compared the panels of two genres of American comics (Independent and Mainstream comics), the study of popular culture and religions is slowly gaining momentum as well. Nevertheless, within the studies of esotericism, or spirituality, the connection between magical practice and popular culture largely still remains omitted and ignored. Here I would argue that, especially within the contemporary spiritual milieu, popular culture plays a much more important and influential role than is usually attributed to it. Especially with the emergence of new (sometimes also called "postmodern") forms of magical practice, such as the popular Chaos Magick and all its numerous subcurrents and variations, the aesthetical as well as narrative influence is on the rise. At the same time, due to the progress in audiovisual technology, the ability to depict mythological worlds, otherworldly beings, or supernatural powers is as advanced as never before (Abbott 2006: 93; Fellner and Fischer 1996: 345). It is thus of no surprise that these possibilities, combined with the seemingly endless imagination of the artists, create immersive storylines, which in turn subsequently influence the behaviour of the practitioners themselves.

This article aims to analyse this interconnectivity of both sides, focusing on the magical practice represented in popular culture, as well as the popular culture implemented into the magical practice. Through literature review, media studies analysis and chosen anthropological methods (participant observation and semi-structured interviews), chosen case

studies will be processed and analysed. At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge the topic's complexity, relative novelty, and the potential for further research. The main limitation of this study is the heterogeneity and often anonymity of the respondents. Often, they prefer communication through digital means, represented under nicknames, and are unwilling to divulge additional personal information outside of their practice and association with popular culture. As such I chose to not focus on the age and gender structure of the respondents, but rather on their persona as a magician, and the Chaos Magick community they are part of. In terms of structure, this article first addresses popular culture within the historical esoteric milieu and then continues to the contemporary one. Here, the focus is aimed initially at case studies representing the modern aesthetic representations of magic within popular culture, and subsequently at the influence said pop-cultural representations have on the practitioners themselves.

THE MAGIC OF POPULAR CULTURE – THE ORIGINS

To investigate the mutual interconnectedness of pop culture and modern magical practice, it's necessary to look at where, when, and how this relationship originated. Despite its emergence being associated with the counter-cultural movements of the 1970s, which will be discussed in a later part of this paper, I would argue that the precursor of these practices was the late 19th century English artist and occultist Austin Osman Spare (Nechvatal 2009: 41). Being actively interested in Western esotericism and theosophy, while at the same time developing a unique and often misunderstood art style (Anonymous 1909: 171), Spare's exhibitions attracted the interest of one of the most prominent occultists of the time, Aleister Crowley (Baker 2011: 48), who invited him to join his new magical order Argenteum Astrum (or A∴A∴) in 1907 (Baker 2011: 65).[1] Nonetheless, already in 1912, after a series of disagreements between Spare and Crowley (Baker 2011: 105), Spare left the order and proceeded to work on his own occult philosophy.[2]

Out of his ideas, the concept of the unconscious mind and his sigil magic practice are the ones that played a major role for later generations of artists/magic practitioners. Spare

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[1] Even though art critics considered Spare to be a talented artist from an early age (at seventeen, he was the youngest artist at the 1904 Royal Academy summer exhibition), his style was seen as controversial. An anonymous reviewer on his *Book of Satyrs* wrote: "Like most young men he seems to take himself somewhat too seriously, and we think for the moment of the manner in which a Goya (who, by the way, is among Mr. Spare's examples) would have treated a similar range of themes. We find a lack of ease and spontaneity underlying all these elaborate fancies. Yet to have conceived such a series of designs is something to an artist's credit, even though the value of line in his work does not seem to us always to have been perfectly understood, so that his drawing is often more shapeless and confused than we trust it will be when he has assimilated better the excellent influences upon which he has formed his style" (Anonymous 1909: 171).

[2] Spare strongly disliked Crowley's emphasis on hierarchical organisation and gradually became critical of the practice of ceremonial magic. Crowley, in return, accused Spare of only being interested in "black magic", which according to Crowley was the reason he prohibited Spare from becoming a full member of the order (Baker 2011: 105). Following his experience with Crowley, Spare developed a lifelong hostility towards ceremonial magic, as well as towards the occultists who practiced it. In his *Book of Pleasure: The Psychology of Ecstasy,* he famously described them as "the unemployed dandies of the Brothels" (Spare 1913: 3).

emphasized the importance of the unconscious part of the mind for artistic endeavours. According to him, the psyche creates repressions of certain desires, which would have the ability to create a new reality, but through conscious repressions, the entry to this reality is prohibited. On the subconscious level, under certain conditions, these repressions can be "forgotten", thus evoking an even stronger impulse of creation, which brings the previously inaccessible reality into existence (Spare 1913: 12).

One of the methods Spare himself applied to this theory was the process of sigilisation. In his *Book of Pleasure*, he describes sigils as "monograms of thought", glyphs, or graphical means to symbolise the desire by giving it form (Spare 1913: 26). This will create a bridge between the conscious and unconscious, as the creation process of the sigil involves the process of forgetting the desire the sigil is representing. The graphical symbol represents the limitations of the desire. In order to release the energy meant to cause the alteration of reality, the symbol needs to be destroyed. The choice of destruction itself is bound only by the imagination of the practitioner, and includes but is not limited to burning, tearing, breaking, drowning, smearing and many others (Grant and Grant 1961: 4; Spare 1913; U.:D.: 2012: 9). This practice, due to its relative simplicity, playfulness and creativity is still one of the most popular forms of contemporary practical magic even today.

Even though Austin Osman Spare was undoubtedly one of the most important figures of Western esotericism who combined art, visual culture, and magical practice, he was not the only one. In 1949 Spare met another key figure of the magical milieu, the English ceremonial magician Kenneth Grant (Baker 2011: 209). Despite Spare's antipathy towards ceremonial magic, both of them soon became friends. Grant himself was a lifelong collaborator of Aleister Crowley, and for some time after Crowley's death acted as his successor as the Head of the Ordo Templi Orientis, or O.T.O. (an occult secret society of which Crowley assumed control). More importantly, in the 1970s he established his own Thelemic organisation, the Typhonian O.T.O (later the Typhonian Order).[3] Here, he aimed to research a dark realm which he named "Universe B", or the "Tunnels of Set", which was according to Grant a realm opposite to the Qabalistic Tree of Life (Evans 2007: 307). Within this realm Grant drew inspiration heavily from the deities described by the American cosmic-horror author H. P. Lovecraft, and later from ufology (Evans 2007: 308). It is noteworthy that Lovecraft himself rejected any claims of occultism and considered his work as pure fiction (or weird fiction). Even though Grant was the first occult leader that began implementing Lovecraft's cosmology into his magical practice, he was not the last. Among others, Michael Aquino from the Church of Satan incorporated elements from Lovecraft's work into his ritual magic (Engle 2014: 91), and Paul Remi Provost founded the occult organisation the Esoteric Order of Dagon, which is a direct reference to Lovecraft's story *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (Engle 2014: 92; Lovecraft 1936). Like Grant, Aquino and Provost argued in similar terms that Lovecraft's stories contain hidden, cryptic meanings that were unknown even to the author himself (Engle 2014: 92).

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[3]
Thelema is a Western esoteric philosophy and a new religious movement, founded in the early 1900s by Aleister Crowley (Crowley 1966: 61).

If with Austin Osman Spare and Kenneth Grant we were talking about the precursors of combining popular culture and art and magical practice, with the emergence of Chaos Magick, this trend manifested fully. Chaos Magick (often spelled with a "k" at the end) is a term describing a modern approach to magic, founded in 1970s England by Peter J. Carroll and Ray Sherwin (Hine 1995: 9). Drawing heavily from the beliefs of Spare, criticising other occult traditions as too rigid and religious, chaos mages (or chaotes) aimed to strip away the non-pragmatical aspects of occult traditions, to leave behind a set of techniques used for practical means (Otto 2020: 767). The foundational teaching of Chaos Magick is that beliefs influence perceptions, and that the world as we perceive it can be changed through the change of said beliefs (Woodman 2003: 16). As such, every practitioner can create their own syncretic magical system, intentionally combining any magical tradition, religious teaching, philosophy, or culture (even popular) they see fit (Clarke 2004: 105).

Due to this individuality of the practice, a stark difference in opinions, even certain forms of rivalry between the practitioners, often emerge. The aforementioned "do what works for you" approach is notoriously heterogenous, and members of the community are often arguing between themselves about what should and shouldn't be used as a magical practice, relying on their own experiences and interpretations. This is especially the case with attempts to implement non-traditional, or perceivingly "eccentric" elements into the rituals, such as characters from movies, comic books, video games, or any other pop cultural channels. As these ritual designs are strongly emotionally driven (working with elements the practitioner has intensive emotional binding to), the peer-critique often revolves around the dichotomy of sympathy-antipathy towards the chosen element.

On the other hand, popular culture and art have always played a pivotal role in this magical practice, as both can be the sources of various symbols and symbol systems. These symbols, following Spare's philosophy, when sufficient belief is invested in them, can rival in importance any traditional or established magical or religious symbolism (Carroll 1987: 30). The main symbol of Chaos Magick – the Chaos star (also known as Chaos orb or sigil of Chaos) – originates from the works of the fantasy author Michael Moorcock (1970), even though a similar symbol had already been used by A. Crowley for his Eight of Wands tarot card design.

Despite Chaos Magick being a practice not confined to any institution, and not following any fixed hierarchical structure, several organisations came into existence. Two of the most prominent ones are The Illuminates of Thanateros (IOT), founded in 1978, describing itself as the Order for "serious" Chaos Mages in the same way as the OTO is for "serious" Thelemites" (Hine 1995: 192), and Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (TOPY), a chaos/sex magic/experimental art collective, founded by the English singer, performance and visual artist Genesis Breyer P-Orridge in 1972 (P-Orridge 2010: 18).

With the popularity of Chaos Magick on the rise, it was no surprise that it attracted many artists and other celebrities of the time. Genesis P-Orridge studied for nearly a decade under the American writer and visual artists William S. Burroughs, who was at that time heavily involved with the Chaos Magick movement (P-Orridge 2010: 17). The Scottish comic book writer Grant Morrison wrote one of his most famous works, *The Invisibles*, as a "hypersigil", his own small magician's universe, which should have the power to influence real life (Morrison 2003: 21). The South African hip-hop duo Die Antwoord, Danny Carey from the band Tool, the electronic musician Richard D. James, better known under his pseudonym Aphex Twin, or the Chilean-French avant-garde filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky are further examples of artists who implement Chaos Magick practices, philosophy, and visuals into their work (Burke 2018: 1). Due to the visual and narrative talents of the artists, their work has often become the source of inspiration for further practitioners. In my research among Chaos Magick practitioners, a substantial number of respondents admitted that their initial interest in magic came from pop culture. Based on the narrative aspect, the comic book series *The Invisibles* (1994–2000, DC Comics) by Grant Morrison was the most commonly mentioned first step into magic, followed by tabletop games such as *Dungeons & Dragons,* and video games (ongoing research, 2023).

Of particular importance to the respondents was also the visual aspect of popular culture. In contrast to real-world stories, the supernatural ones form a whole separate genre of the entertainment industry. Fictional worlds tap into the human preferences for exploration, which have been co-opted by cultural evolution for entertainment (Dubourg and Baumard 2022: 31). Spectators can find character traits in fictional characters that reflect their own traits – real or desired ones – and offer possibilities of self-projection to situations and abilities that are impossible in the real world (Park and Henley 2007: 44). The exposure to visual stimuli, also in the form of audio-visual entertainment, in moderate amounts, can have multiple beneficial effects on the individual. Stress relief (Sedghikhanshir et al. 2022: 1780), improvement of motor skills (Nuernberger et al. 2023: 13–14), or character building (Dubourg and Baumard 2022: 33) are just several aspects of visual culture that have already caught the attention of researchers.

In this chapter, I've focused mainly on the aesthetic depictions of the practitioner and the practice. The data pool consisted of movies and TV shows that explicitly dealt with topics of magic and the occult, where one of the main or supporting characters was a practising magician in any form. The geographical space of the depicted narrative was limited to European or US origins. Fictional worlds with lore grounded in European or US folklore, such as *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* were also considered adequate. The temporal setting of the narrative was not a major decisive factor, but I focused predominantly on contemporary times. Out of the data pool, several case studies were chosen for detailed qualitative content analysis (Bengtsson 2016: 9). Due to the spatial limitations of this paper, I'll only be discussing several examples that represent the variations of depictions in the most

suitable way (from the aesthetic as well as esoteric standpoint), leaving other topics that are not discussed here for potential future research.

THE PRACTITIONER

When thinking about the persona of the mage, or the witch, the aesthetics and visual narrative were dominated for decades by two major archetypes: the old man, usually bearded, dressed in robes, often wearing hats of various forms, and the crone, similarly old, rugged in apparel, often with noticeable physical abnormalities or deformations (a hunchback, a long nose, warts, etc.). Even though not exclusively, both of these archetypes often had malicious intent towards the hero, who needed to overcome their trials to achieve his goal.[4] Both often serve as the main antagonist of the story, even though in the case of male mages, the function of a wise man, an advisor to the protagonist, is also frequent. The witch archetype can be found, for example, in the character of the Grand High Witch in the movie *Witches* (the original from 1990, dir. Nicolas Roeg, as well as the remake from 2020, dir. Robert Zemeckis), or Helena Markos, a.k.a. Mother Markos from the movie *Suspiria* (original 1977, dir. Dario Argento, remake 2018, dir. Luca Guadagnino). In these examples the appearance of the witches is two-fold: the "masked form" in which they appear to the unknowing environment, and in which they appear no different from normal humans, and the "true form", a disfigured, grotesque, almost monstrous one.

The image of the horrid crone is something that has been revised in recent decades. During the 1970s, in connection to several women's and feminist movements, the witch was slowly rebranded from the antagonistic creature to a symbol of female empowerment and liberation (Kwaschik 2023: 189). This transition was also marked with the new, intensified beauty standards and aestheticization (Cait 2023: 6) Modern witches aimed to manifest their independence and often anti-establishment demeanour openly, and as such a re-evaluation of the aesthetics of the witch trope was necessary. After all, in the culture of beauty, nobody wants to be associated with symbols of ugliness and repulsion. The old crone needed to make room for the attractive, strong, independent female, so that the aesthetical self-stylisation, in accordance with the fictional models of popular culture, could be used for self-identification and character building. In response, many old forms of the witch archetype are still being reinterpreted today, with the previous antagonist redeemed and re-imagined as the protagonist (Dagalp 2022: 20, 69). Such is the case of Elsa from the *Frozen* franchise (2013–2019, dir. Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee), inspired by H. Ch. Andersen's evil Snow Queen (Andersen 1884), or *Maleficent* (2014, dir. Robert Stromberg) as the altered version of the main antagonist from the story of Sleeping Beauty.

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[4] Ivan Bilibin, the late 19th century Russian illustrator, skillfully depicted both of these archetypes in Slavic folklore in the form of Koshchei the Deathless (an archetypical evil, immortal wizard) and Baba Yaga (an old witch living in the forest).

The 1996 movie *The Craft* (dir. Andrew Fleming) is one of the earliest representations of witches that marked the transition from crone to attractive young witch, followed by the TV series *Charmed* (1998–2006, created by Constance M. Burge).[5] This kind of new witch was attractive, designed according to the contemporary beauty standards, independent, and thus one of the main driving forces of the narrative. Aimed predominantly at teenagers and young adults, it is not difficult to imagine why they became the models of behaviour for almost a whole generation (Rudy 2022: 146). Partridge observed a similar trend with the character of Willow Rosenberg from the series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003, created by Joss Whedon), who is another example of a young, attractive, independent witch, and served as a role model for many young wiccan practitioners (Partridge 2005: 133).

This trend is still present in cinema today, with examples such as Wanda Maximoff, a.k.a. the Scarlet Witch in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (2014–2022, dir. various), the witches in the TV series *The Magicians* (2015–2020, created by Sera Gamble and John McNamara), the 2015 movie *The Witch* (dir. Robert Eggers), or in the third season of the *American Horror Story: Coven* series (2013, created by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk).[6] These aesthetical standards are subsequently also reflected in the stylisation and fashion choices of many modern real-life witches, which has led to the emergence of the witchcore style – an aesthetic centred around the themes of modern witchcraft. The popularity of this style can also be tracked on social media, where the hashtag #witchcore at the time of writing this paper has over 200,000 posts on Instagram, and over 177 million views on Tiktok (ongoing research 2023).

The situation with male magic practitioners slightly differs from their female counterparts. The archetypical depictions of mages can be found in a plethora of the so-called high fantasy and low fantasy stories, such as Gandalf and Saruman in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003, dir. Peter Jackson), or Dumbledore and Voldemort from the *Harry Potter* film series (2001–2011, dir. various).[7] Similarly to modern witches, mages (or wizards, sorcerers, warlocks, etc.) have also undergone a modern re-imagination. Characters such as Harry Potter and the rest of the young adult cast of the Harry Potter franchise, the male cast of the aforementioned TV show *The Magicians*, Dr Stephen Vincent Strange from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or the street-warlock and occult detective John Constantine from the eponymous movie and TV series (the comic book counterpart on which they are based is titled *Hellblazer*) are also depicted as young and attractive in comparison to the old archetype. However, in

[5]
One could argue that there was also a different trope of the witch in popular culture – the comedic character of the witch placed in an everyday setting, such as the 1960s sitcom *Bewitched* and, aimed at a teenage audience, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996–2003). Due to the comedic setting and silliness of the events depicted, nobody among my respondents mentioned these as a noticeable influence, in contrast to the more dramatic movies and TV series.

[6]
The example in *The Witch* (2015) actually references both depictions. The titular witch is depicted at times as the old, repulsive, child-eating witch of the old archetype, at different times as a young seductive female of the new trope. The main protagonist, Thomasin, represents the new approach fully.

[7]
High fantasy, or epic fantasy, is a subgenre of fantasy fiction set in an alternative, fictional world, with its own rules, which differ from the real world (Stableford 2005: 198). Low fantasy, or intrusion fantasy, is a subgenre of fantasy fiction, in which magical events intrude into the real world (Stableford 2005: 256).

contrast to the witch trope, the archetype of the mage as an old bearded man is still very much alive in modern popular culture. While the witch in the old archetype was mostly associated with negative traits and unappealing appearance, the mage was depicted in a more dualistic sense – the antagonistic evil wizard and the supporting magical advisor, mostly wise and respectable also in appearance. As a positive role model, the second form needed no revision and could exist simultaneously with the new re-imagined modern form. This is also reflected in the aesthetic fashion styles inspired by depictions of mages from popular culture. Similar to witchcore, the style for modern mages (representing the new mage trope – young, attractive, fashionable) emerged as the wizardcore style, while the more traditional one (representing the old mage trope – wise, bearded) emerged as the magewave style.[8]

In addition to the two aforementioned mage types, there is also a third one. Represented in movies like *A Dark Song* (2016, dir. Liam Gavin) or *Anything for Jackson* (2020, dir. Justin G. Dyck), this type isn't aesthetically distinguishable from an everyday person. These mages dress in standard clothing, with little to no intention of standing out; some are even depicted as socially awkward, shy, or reclusive, sometimes showing signs of antisocial behaviour. What differentiates them from other people is their extensive knowledge of magical symbolism and practical magic. Their position within the story tends to gravitate towards the secondary antagonist, unwilling advisor, or antihero. Even though their intellectual or opinional appeal might resonate with the audience (mostly due to their sarcastic, anti-social, or even nihilistic views), their aesthetic appeal is usually low.

THE PRACTICE

Building a sufficiently believable image of a magician is a difficult task on its own, but it pales in comparison to the depiction of the magical practice itself. While real-life practitioners are individual people with their individual tastes and there is no fixed rule of what is and what is not allowed, especially within the diversity of Chaos Magick, the practice itself can be subjected to stricter rules. As we have already mentioned, while Chaos Magick is liberal in its practice, other schools of magic are not. Rituals have rules concerning setting, symbolism, texts, and gesticulation, which need to be followed. As such, in depictions of magical practice, we can identify the following three categories:

– The depicted practice is fictional, with occasional loose inspiration from folklore.

– The depicted practice is trying to claim some level of legitimacy, mostly through symbols or texts, but it is used in a different or incorrect way.

– The depicted practice is trying to represent the original source as closely as possible, with occasional alterations due to the needs of the narrative.

[8]
As is usual in fashion, the mentioned styles rarely work individually. In an attempt to create a unique look, they are often combined with other subcultural styles, such as gothcore, metalcore, devilcore, lustcore, acidwave, punk, and many others.

In the first category we can find most of the big movie blockbusters and popular TV series aimed at the broadest audience. *Lord of the Rings* was loosely inspired by Norse mythology (Barton 2022: 1), *Harry Potter* draws from Greek and Roman mythology (Indulkar 2013: 27; Saeed 2015: 103), and many of the mentioned popular TV series are a playful variation of old European myths and fairy tales.

It is the subsequent two categories that we'll analyse more deeply. Each will be represented by a chosen case study movie – the second category by the American horror movie *Anything for Jackson* (2020, dir. Justin G. Dyck) and the third by the Irish horror movie *A Dark Song* (2016, dir. Liam Gavin). The main motive in both movies is the death of a child and the attempt to deal with the situation through magical means.

Case study 1 – Anything for Jackson

Plot summary: An elderly couple who lost their only grandson in a car accident attempt a "reversed exorcism" – to bring back the soul of the deceased child and place it into the unborn baby of a pregnant woman they have kidnapped. They join a local Satanist group, and with the help of another member, Ian (an expert in magic), they try to conduct the ritual.

Several elements of the story are of particular interest here – the magical book, the demonic entity, and the symbolism contained in the book.

The book, according to the story, "appears to be written over many years, in different languages, dialects, and religions, and it might be the oldest book in the world" (01:04:13). During a detailed shot of the book's pages, we can see several noteworthy symbols – multiple inverted crosses, a leviathan cross and a deer with two arrows stuck in its forehead (01:04:43). The invoked demon is called Surgat, who, according to the movie narrative, "is the demon who unlocks the gate between us and tormented souls" (01:05:51). Due to lack of space, we'll be focusing only on these three interconnected elements.

First, the symbolism: it is true that the inverted cross, even though originally known as the Cross of Saint Peter (Rest 1954: 29), has been associated with occultism and later satanism in numerous modern pop-cultural cases. Nonetheless, its first usage as an occult symbol is connected with the 19th century occult leader Eugene Vintras, who according to the prominent French occultist Éliphas Lévi, wore it as a sign of his new faith (where the traditional cross represented the "Reign of Suffering", the inverted one should symbolise the "Reign of Love") (Jules-Bois 1900: 237). In 1846 Pope Gregory XVI accused Vintras of homosexuality, conducting Black Masses in the nude, and masturbating on the altar, of which he was never found guilty (Waite 1906: 109). Despite this, it was the first instance where the inverted cross was associated with anti-Christian sentiments. It was only following the 1960s movie and TV productions that the inverted cross became the most noticeable satanic symbol.[9]

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[9]
Other than the immensely popular *Rosemary's Baby* (1968, dir. Roman Polanski), other movies that contained the inverted cross as a satanic symbol were, for example, *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964, dir. Roger Corman), *Black Sunday* (1960, dir. Mario Bava), *The Devil Rides Out* (1968, dir. Terence Fisher), or *The Satanist* (1968, dir. Zoltan G. Spencer).

Andrej Kapcar
Pop Spirituality: The Application of Popular Culture in Contemporary Esoteric Practices

One of the most influential examples is the 1968 movie *Rosemary's Baby* (dir. Roman Polanski), where in the final scenes the titular infant is gifted an inverted cross as a sign of Satan.

The leviathan cross, another symbol commonly associated with satanism, originally the alchemical symbol for sulfur, was adapted in the 1960s by Anton LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan (Koch 1955: 73; LaVey 1969: 218). The deer with the arrows in his head was taken from the chapter "Aemula naturae" in the book *Devises Heroïques* by Claude Paradin (Paradin 1557: 111). This publication is a collection of 182 emblems and mottos, commonly used as markers by the aristocracy, as well as decorative elements by artists (Sharratt 2005). Other than its seemingly sinister design, this picture bears no occult, esoteric, or satanic meaning whatsoever.

Surgat himself is considered a minor demonic entity known as the "one who opens all locks". His name is briefly mentioned in the 17th–18th century *Grimoire of Pope Honorius* (Kelly 2019a: 51–52) and the 18th century *Grimorium Verum* (Kelly 2019b: 18). With the earliest component in the book being an illustration from a 17th century emblem catalogue, it is hardly imaginable that the magical book in question is the "oldest book in the world". As such, the visual content of *Anything for Jackson* works with symbols that are seemingly occult, or occult but used in an incorrect setting, relying on the aesthetical message rather than the content. The aim here was to create a narrative and atmosphere based on identifiable symbols (inverted crosses) or symbolic meanings (disturbing imagery) and not to focus on the authenticity of the content.

Case study 2 – A Dark Song

Plot summary: A grieving mother who lost her son tries to conduct a difficult ritual to contact her child with the help of a ceremonial magician. The pair is locked in a magically sealed house and the majority of the movie focuses on the hardships of the ritual practice, while several personal traumas and hidden agendas are revealed.

Many of my respondents consider *A Dark Song* to be a movie that depicts the ritual practice as realistically as possible and as such it has become a benchmark for the quality in occult themed narrative cinema. The ritual in the movie, aimed to invoke the Holy Guardian Angel, is known as the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage, from the *Book of Abramelin*, an early 17th century (maybe older) grimoire. It is the same ritual as was conducted by Aleister Crowley in the Boleskine House in 1899 (Readdy 2020: 15). Even though the director took some artistic liberties with several elements for the dramatization of the story (such as the inclusion of Chinese and Tibetan characters during the magical process, which are not part of the original ritual), most of the parts follow the requirements for the ritual in detail.

The ritual in the movie takes about six to eight months to accomplish, which is in accordance with the English translation of the grimoire by S. L. MacGregor Mathers (1975) (later, more complete translations mention eighteen months), the same length as Crowley was planning (Readdy 2020: 13). The earliest versions of the manuscript are written in German, a later copy was in French. The protagonists of the movie discuss the proficiency

of reading, speaking and understanding German and French (19:10). The ritual requires cleanliness, a strict diet and abstinence from alcohol, drugs and sex. One of the characters, struggling with alcoholism and addiction, has to deal with it before the beginning of the ritual (11:13). The setting has to be ritually sealed by a circle of salt, which can also be seen in the movie (22:15). Throughout the movie we can see the protagonist undergo a series of torturous procedures, often inflicting harm on oneself, in order to reach altered states of consciousness, another aspect that is true to the original source. Similarly, the process of summoning and subsequently banishing the Lords/Kings of Hell, and summoning the Holy Guardian Angel, or the creation of magical squares (sigils containing the mystical words) are also depicted in accordance with the original ritual.

Within the study of esotericism in modern pop culture, *A Dark Song* is a unique phenomenon. While still following a comprehensible and relatable narrative, it includes a number of minor details that are aimed at practitioners and researchers, and are easily missable or not understandable for the casual viewer. It is of no surprise that it had an alluring effect on enthusiasts interested in studying magic, who through the movie researched and studied the original sources.

While these two examples are taken from movies dealing with explicitly occult themes, modern practitioners of magic do not limit themselves to only such "serious" depictions. Due to the aforementioned syncretic nature of Chaos Magick, anything can become a source of magical symbolism. Seemingly mundane activities, such as growing plants in the animated movie *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988, dir. Hayao Miyazaki), can become a baseline for agricultural rituals, or a signature clothing type, such as the superheroine's jacket in *Jessica Jones* (2015, created by Melissa Rosenberg) can become a vessel for a protective spell. Similar to art, in Chaos Magick the design (of the ritual) is also only limited by the imagination of the practitioner.

CONCLUSION

Modern times bring modern revisions, and even magical practice is no exception to this rule. Thanks to modern technology as well as the post-modern approach to magical practice, previously clandestine and hierarchical practices have been brought to light and to the public. Modern schools of magic have thrown away the dogmatic and religious approach of ceremonial practice and approached magic from a new perspective: as a tool for achieving one's desires. Free from rigorous norms, new rituals have been designed, combining elements that would previously be unheard of. At the same time, magical practice was absorbed into the media as a narrative and visual source of entertainment. Thanks to the influence of popular culture, magic worlds, magical practices and magical practitioners have become part of every household, influencing millions of viewers in the process.

The original archetypes related to practitioners of magic – the mage and the witch – have also changed over time, undergoing a process of aestheticization. While the original ones, represented by old, secluded, mostly antagonistic characters, were part of folktales for

hundreds of years, the situation has changed dramatically in the last few decades. Mirroring societal changes related to counter-cultural, artistic, anarchistic, and feminist movements, the image of the witch has changed. It evolved from the evil old crone, an image that resonated throughout the Middle Ages, to a strong, independent, often visually attractive woman. The times of witches being destined only for a painful demise at the hands of the heroic protagonist are over, the new witch is free of the repressions and is firmly defending her position in society. The transition from the antagonist to the protagonist has been completed. Following this new trend, it is understandable that many of the witches in popular culture have become role models for young women around the world. It was this combination of self-sufficiency, strength, appearance and magical powers that has given rise to new fashion trends, but also increased interest in magic and spirituality. A similar trend could also be seen with their male counterparts, the mages, who experienced modernisation as well. The age of the new, modern magician is now.

But what is the practitioner without the practice? In this case, visual artists use their interest in and knowledge of magic to create depictions of magical practice, ranging from purely fictional, to inspired, to precise. Without claiming one is better than the others, as each serves a different purpose, the chosen examples aimed to represent the appropriate categories in the most descriptive way. Magic and art have thus become two sides of a coin – drawing inspiration from each other, and at the same time, mutually influencing each other in a never-ending cycle of inspiration, alteration and adaptation. As this paper focused mostly on the various levels of accuracy in magic depictions within popular culture from the esoteric perspective, there is also a vast potential for additional research. Considering the cultural impact this new wave of magical fascination is having on the audience, as well as on content creators, it is safe to claim that popular culture and magical practice are now as interconnected as never before.

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POVZETEK

V zadnjih desetletjih zanimanje za ezoteriko in magično prakso postopoma pridobiva zagon. Kar je bilo dolgo časa stvar skrivnih organizacij z ekskluzivnim članstvom, skrito pred očmi javnosti, počasi prodira med širšo javnost in spodbuja zanimanje različnih subkultur. Na podlagi te modernizacije so se razvile različne »postmoderne« šole magije, predvsem popularna *Chaos Magick*, ki je razbila okove tradicionalnih obredov in jih ponovno zgradila na nov, sinkretičen, »naredi sam« način. Pomembno vlogo pri tem prestrukturiranju je imela popularna kultura. Ta kulturni fenomen, ki je prodrl v milijone gospodinjstev po vsem sve-

tu, se je izkazal tudi kot močan medij za posredovanje ezoteričnih idej, simbolov in likov. Navdihnjena s tradicionalnimi magičnimi arhetipi tako praktikov kot prakse, je popularna kultura naredila to, kar zna najbolje – si stvar na novo zamislila in jo preoblikovala. Tradicionalne upodobitve čarovniških praktikov niso bile več primerne, saj so morale odražati sodobne ideje o tem, kaj je vabljivo in privlačno. Prenovljene čarovnice in magi, v skladu z novimi, sodobnimi standardi vizualne privlačnosti, so za mnoge mlade praktike postali novi arhetipi. Na podoben način je bila prenovljena tudi sama magična praksa. Vsaka različica magične prakse je na svoj način predstavljena znotraj popularne kulture, od fiktivnih ali »izmišljenih« upodobitev do obredov, ki točno sledijo ritualom, opisanim v čarovniških knjigah. Ker sta oba moderna fenomena še vedno v vzponu, povezava med sodobno magično prakso in popularno kulturo kot njenim medijem najverjetneje še ne bo kmalu izginila.

Cognitive and Evolutionary Inspirations in the Study of Religion with Emphasis on the Development of Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology in Slovakia

Spoznavni in evolucijski navdihi pri študiju religije s poudarkom na razvoju etnologije in sociokulturne antropologije na Slovaškem

Michal Uhrin

ABSTRACT

The cognitive and evolutionary approach to the research of religion in cultural and social anthropology has been systematically developing since the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. At the end of the 1990s, cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion began to be applied in the research of religion by a narrow group of ethnologists, religionists, and anthropologists in Slovakia. This paper aims to provide a basic overview of the fundamental concepts of cognitive and evolutionary anthropology of religion. It focuses on selected scholars whose works and ideas are considered pivotal in the development of this field. The second objective is to outline how cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion have been reflected in ethnology and sociocultural anthropology in Slovakia.

KEYWORDS: religion, ritual, cognitive and evolutionary science of religion, Slovakia

IZVLEČEK

V socialni in kulturni antropologiji se kognitivni in evolucijski pristop do raziskovanja religij sistematično razvija od devetdesetih let 20. stoletja in prvega desetletja 21. stoletja. Ozka skupina etnologov, religiologov in antropologov je na Slovaškem ob koncu devetdesetih let začela uporabljati kognitivne in evolucijske teorije religije pri raziskovanju religije. Namen tega prispevka je podati pregled temeljnih konceptov kognitivne in evolucijske antropologije religije. Osredotoča se na dela in ideje strokovnjakov, ki veljajo za ključna pri razvoju tega področja. Drugi cilj prispevka je predstaviti, kako se kognitivne in evolucijske teorije religije odražajo v etnologiji in socialni in kulturni antropologiji na Slovaškem.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: religija, ritual, kognitivna in evolucijska znanost o religiji, Slovaška

INTRODUCTION[1]

Religion has been the focus of anthropologists for decades, with many theories attempting to explain its numerous aspects. A cognitive and evolutionary approach to the study of religion began to develop in the 1970s and was influenced by the second cognitive revolution. The cognitive and evolutionary science of religion, from this point onwards also referred to as CESR, has provided compelling new insights into the research of religion (for an overview, see Atran 1999, 2004; Bloch 1998; Boyer 2001; D'Andrade 1995; Whitehouse 2021; Xygalatas 2022). This paper aims to provide a basic overview of the fundamental concepts of CESR. I will focus on selected scholars whose works and ideas are considered pivotal in the development of this field. Although this may entail the risk of omitting specific papers, books, or research, I aim to highlight the broader general trends in the development of CESR by using specific research interests as examples. The second objective is to outline how cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion have been reflected in ethnology and sociocultural anthropology in Slovakia. I will focus not only on empirical research in which these theories are applied but also on studies reflecting the theoretical and methodological aspects of cognitive and evolutionary approaches to the study of religion.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE COGNITIVE AND EVOLUTIONARY INSPIRATIONS IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Cognitive science began to focus more closely on religion in the second half of the 1970s. This interest was sparked by developments in psychology, computer sciences, and cognitive science. A fundamental role in this development was played by the work of linguist Noam Chomsky. Chomsky's concept of generative grammar, syntactic structures, and the critique of behaviourism in psychology played a critical role in the development of the the-

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Michal Uhrin
Cognitive and Evolutionary Inspirations in the Study of Religion with Emphasis on the Development of Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology in Slovakia

Vol. 2, Nr. 2, July 2024

47

ory, methodology, and epistemology of the social sciences and humanities (Chomsky 1957, 1959). Chomsky's work has demonstrated that scientific study can encompass more than just observable entities or activities – i.e. more than stimuli and subsequent reactions. Within the realm of religious research, this means that the object of study need not be limited to external descriptions and interpretations of rituals, magical practices, religious pilgrimages, or worldviews. Focusing primarily on external descriptions of observed phenomena provided by research participants or generated by researchers was predominant in most anthropological research during this period, and to some extent still is today (for a further general critique of such an approach in sociocultural anthropology, see Bloch 1998; Boyer 1990; D'Andrade 1995 or Shore 1996). On the other hand, the attention of researchers was slowly shifting towards the systems of meanings and symbols shared by members of specific societies. Additionally, scientists began to focus on the outcomes of the interactions of the human mind, which was viewed as a complex instrument whose structure relates to the acquisition of language and culture, with the outside world. To summarise, because of this development anthropologists have gradually begun to focus on the interaction of the mind (evolved psychological and cognitive mechanisms, tendencies, and subsequent behaviour), culture and environment (social and ecological). Subsequently, the object of interest has also shifted towards different ways in which our mind processes diverse inputs from the outside world (Bloch 1998; Boyer 2001; Bužeková, Jerotijević and Kanovský 2011; D'Andrade 1995; Kanovský 2002a, 2002b; Shore 1996).

Stewart Guthrie, one of the pioneers in this area of research, is inclined to the generally accepted view that the cognitive science of religion did not begin to develop systematically until the 1970s when the first theories and methodological approaches were established. However, he goes on to add that the ethnographic foundations can be traced back to the second half of the 20th century, and the philosophical foundations date back even further to thinkers such as Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677), David Hume (1711–1766), and Robin Horton (1932–2019) (Guthrie 2013). The philosophical origins of the cognitive science of religion can thus be traced as far back as the philosophical debates about the nature of knowledge and cognition taking place in the 17th century.

Before the advance of the cognitive and evolutionary study of religion, the study of religion in sociocultural anthropology focused on all that makes religion specific and "different" from the profane realm and everyday existence: mystical states, rituals, belief in supernatural entities, possession, astral travel, religious sacrifices, magic, etc. (Bloch 1998; Boyer 1990; D'Andrade 1995 or Shore 1996). However, from the perspective of CESR, religion is a result of standard psychological mechanisms working in both religious and non-religious contexts. These mechanisms are part of human psychology, developed over time through biological and cultural evolution and coevolutionary processes – known as culture and gene coevolution (Boyd and Richerson 1985; Boyer 2001; Henrich 2015). These mechanisms and tendencies are a standard part of the psychology of every healthy individual. This means that religion is not a unique form of human behaviour different from a whole plethora of other kinds of human behaviour or phenomenon *sui generis*, as previously

believed by social scientists. Instead, religious phenomena are the result of the same psychological mechanisms as all other forms of human behaviour. This perspective provides a fresh and compelling angle on one of the longest-standing areas of research in ethnology and sociocultural anthropology (e.g. Boyer 2001; Whitehouse 2021; Xygalatas 2012, 2022).

In recent decades the study of religion has been revitalised by a surge in interdisciplinary work (for a general overview, see Whitehouse 2021; Xygalatas 2022). In the cognitive and evolutionary sciences of religion, this interdisciplinary work can roughly be divided into two main areas: cognitive studies and behavioural approaches. The former, Soler (2012) argues, focuses on the acquisition and transfer of religious concepts as by-products of other cognitive abilities (e.g. Barrett 2004; Boyer 1994, 2001; Guthrie 1993; Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley and Lawson 2002). A second group of researchers have been more concerned with adaptive explanations that focus, for example, on the relationship between ritual and prosociality, which I will address below (e.g. Bulbulia 2004; Soler 2012: 346; Sosis 2003, 2004; Sosis and Alcorta 2003; Sosis and Ruffle 2003). The second approach is closely associated with the notion of religion being the result of evolution by natural selection. As Boyer and Bergstrom argue, while such a research agenda is of more recent date, its germs can be seen in the work of the 'father' of evolutionary theory through natural selection, Charles Darwin (1809–1882) (Boyer and Bergstrom 2008: 112; Darwin 1871; Purzycki and Sosis 2009).

Following on from the previous paragraph, understanding the selection pressures that have shaped the human mind and body throughout biological and cultural evolution is also essential within CESR. An important question is whether religion is a by-product of other psychological mechanisms or an adaptation. Depending on the answer, we can divide researchers into two imaginary camps. Joseph Bulbulia refers to the first group as *spandrelists* (religion has no adaptive value *per se*) and the latter as *adaptationists* (religion is a functional mechanism and can be best explained as the target of natural selection) (Boyer and Bergstrom 2008; Bulbulia 2004: 656; Kundt 2015; Purzycki et al. 2022; Purzycki and Sosis 2023). The matter at hand is of utmost importance to CESR and cannot be considered resolved (e.g. Sosis 2009).

In explaining cultural phenomena such as religion, cognitive and evolutionary anthropologists consider the cultural, social, historical, economic, and ecological context. However, equally important is how our minds process information and what psychological and cognitive mechanisms are involved in this processing. They pay systematic attention to the aspects of cultural transmission and learning connected to memory (Bužeková 2018). In this type of research, emphasis is placed on understanding how information is acquired, stored, and recalled. The distinction between long-term and short-term, semantic and episodic memory and their role in the rituals and the acquisition of knowledge about religion is central to many contemporary cognitive and evolutionary approaches to religion (e.g. Boyer 2009; Boyer and Wertsch 2009; Whitehouse 2000, 2002, 2004, 2021; Xygalatas 2022).

The field of CESR combines the theoretical and methodological approaches of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The research carried out by CESR encompasses various methods, including controlled laboratory experiments using modern technologies, field experiments, and long-term stationary ethnographic research. Qualitative methods such

Michal Uhrin
*Cognitive and Evolutionary Inspirations in the Study
of Religion with Emphasis on the Development of
Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology in Slovakia*

as ethnographic interview and participant observation, along with experimental, psychological, and statistical methods are employed with the aim of the most comprehensive understanding of religion (for an overview, see Jerotijević 2012, 2013; Kundtová Klocová 2014; Xygalatas 2013).

Cognitive scientist of religion Ilkka Pyysiäinen, echoing cognitive anthropologist Pascal Boyer, argues that although theories about religious phenomena can be developed, it is perhaps impossible to develop a theory (my emphasis added) of religion as a whole (Pyysiäinen 2012: 5–6). The first wave of evolutionary and cognitive anthropologists of religion, whose works will be considered below, focused on creating scientific theories explaining phenomena such as magic, the transmission of supernatural ideas, rituals, or modes of religious behaviour (e.g. Atran 1999, 2004; Barrett 2004; Boyer 2001; Guthrie 1993; Whitehouse 2004). The general idea of constructing an all-encompassing theory of religion is oftentimes rejected by cognitive and evolutionary theorists of religion (Pyysiäinen 2012: 5–6.).

Finally, representatives of classical cultural evolutionism in anthropology, such as Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917), James George Frazer (1854–1941), John Lubbock (1834–1913), Max Muller (1823–1900), or Robert R. Marret (1866–1943), sought to find the first hypothetical form of religion, or lack thereof, and its point of origin in the course of human history (Stocking 1968, 1987). In terms of the idea of unilinear evolution, they created hypothetical models of the evolution of religion based on the idea of progress and advancement towards increasingly complex forms of it (Kundt 2015). Contemporary CESR scholars do not seek to find the first exact form of religion, as had been the case in earlier anthropological theories. As Boyer and Bergstrom point out, most contemporary evolutionary approaches to religion avoid speculation about archaic forms of religious behaviour and experience (Boyer and Bergstrom 2008: 113). More often they postulate insightful partial theories explaining specific aspects of religion, from which empirically testable hypotheses can be derived. Last but not least, the methodology and theoretical assumptions of the current CESR theories are fundamentally different from the works of classical evolutionists, and even though researchers avoid unfounded speculations about the original forms of religious behaviour, this does not mean that there is not a scientifically rigorous and well-founded effort to find the antecedents of religious behaviour (e.g. Lang and Kundt 2023).

THE FIRST WAVE OF THE COGNITIVE AND EVOLUTIONARY SCIENCE OF RELIGION

The first cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion started to develop at the end of the 20th and in the first decade of the 21st century (Atran 1999, 2004; Boyer 1994, 2001; Guthrie 1993; Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley and Lawson 2002; Sperber 1975, 1985, 1996). In the following section, I will outline the approaches of just a few selected scholars whose work can be considered milestones, illustrate broader trends in research, and have spurred further exploration in these areas.

Stewart Guthrie conceived one of the first cognitive approaches to the study of religion (Guthrie 1993). Guthrie explored ideas regarding the relationship between anthro-

pomorphism and the supernatural. Because we as humans tend to anthropomorphise the world around us, it could be argued that religious phenomena can be understood best as systematic anthropomorphism. Given the uncertainties of the world, it becomes convenient – also potentially advantageous from an evolutionary perspective – to attribute intention (agency) to natural phenomena as well. Religious entities are therefore often characterised by human-like attributes, be they physical or mental (Guthrie 1993).

Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley's pioneering works (Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley and Lawson 2002) were the first to offer a cognitive theory of religious rituals. They explained the frequency and cultural forms of these rituals in terms of implicit cognitive processes that are released by either dramatic or repeated practices. According to their theory of rituals, humans have certain intuitions about the structure and efficacy of a given ritual, which they possess naturally. These intuitions or implicit expectations persist even in the absence of explicit instruction, as evidenced by people's readiness to participate in and learn ritual activities (Jerotijević and Maňo 2014: 142–143). Despite the focus on cognitive processes, the social and cultural aspects of rituals are not ignored. Cognitive and evolutionary anthropologists are inspired by Durkheim's view of collective religious rituals as a tool for social integration, cohesion, and the maintenance of cooperation. Contemporary evolutionary studies of ritual have shown that participation in religious rituals promotes cooperation and prosociality. I will return to the topic of rituals, prosocial behaviour, and cooperation in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Dan Sperber's work has been instrumental in shaping the broader theoretical foundations of cognitive and evolutionary approaches to the study of religion. In the 1970s, Sperber raised a fundamental critique regarding the interpretive and symbolic approaches in anthropology, which at the time constituted the dominant theoretical platform (Sperber 1975). As Jerotijević and Maňo say, Sperber argued in favour of the notion that cultural phenomena, including religion, cannot be fully explained without an explanation of the cognitive mechanisms that are causally linked to them. In this way, he set himself apart from schools of thought that understood cultural institutions, including religion, as *sui generis* phenomena. This idea appears already in the work of sociologist Émile Durkheim, who saw religion as a *sui generis* social fact (Durkheim 1995 [1915]). However, according to Sperber, it is not possible to perceive religion as a *sui generis* phenomenon and consequently treat it as an *explanans* of other macro phenomena (Jerotijević and Maňo 2014: 142).

Sperber is known for developing the concept of the epidemiology of representations inspired by the field of epidemiology, which analyses the distribution, and all the underlying processes and determinants, of diseases in a population (Sperber 1985, 1996). Sperber therefore proposed a research program aimed at how and why certain kinds of mental representations become widespread more easily than others in human populations (Pyysiäinen 2012: 6.) Sperber's theory does not address the existence of concrete representations, i.e. specific cultural phenomena, but as Bahna says, it defines in general terms the ontological and epistemological conditions for the transmission of any ideas and beliefs (Bahna 2019: 11).

As discussed above, from the perspective of cognitive and evolutionary approaches to religion, human minds process information from the environment in the form of mental representations or beliefs.[2] Sperber distinguishes two basic types of such representations. The first are intuitive representations that are the result of spontaneous and unconscious inferential and perceptual processes. On the one hand, intuitive beliefs are based on the processing of information coming from the environment – social, cultural, or ecological. On the other hand, reflective representations, or the so-called meta-representations, are based solely on what is mediated by communication (Sperber 1996 as cited in Bužeková 2009: 26). Supernatural concepts (religious concepts) in terms of Sperber's approach, represent reflexive representations, thus, when taking a stance towards them, an evaluative context should be important – in particular, verification of the context and source of information about supernatural concepts and their credibility (Bužeková 2009: 30). This means that in taking a stance towards reflective beliefs, who is giving the information and on what occasion plays a crucial role. From this perspective, supernatural conceptions disseminated during rituals (e.g. a Christian mass) by a religious expert (e.g. a Christian pastor) have more credibility for a member of the Christian religion than the same conceptions disseminated in a different context – e.g. overheard from an unknown person while travelling on public transport. In addition, Sperber also distinguishes between mental and public representations, which he argues collectively constitute culture. On the one hand, mental representations constitute ideas, beliefs, preferences, etc. and are mental states in the minds of individuals. On the other hand, he defines public representations as external signals, statements, texts, behaviours, artefacts, etc. that we produce based on mental representations (Bužeková 2009; Kanovský 2011; Sperber 1996 as cited in Bahna 2019: 11).

Pascal Boyer expanded upon Sperber's ideas and established significant theoretical, methodological, and epistemological foundations for the CESR. Boyer's early works focused on themes such as approaches to the research of tradition in anthropological studies, religious expertise, and the transmission of supernatural ideas, among others (Boyer 1990, 1994, 2001). Many other scholars have since expanded on these themes following Boyer's ideas. His work brought about significant changes in the understanding of the concept of tradition in anthropological and ethnological practice. Boyer points out that terms such as tradition are often used intuitively in anthropological writings without deeper definitions or with definitions that are insufficient or tautological. He highlights that these terms present important problems that should be explained by considering cognitive and psychological processes (Bužeková 2011: 99; Tužinská 2006: 34; Uhrin 2019).

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[2] This statement pertains mainly to the first wave of CESR researchers, whose concepts are discussed in this section. These researchers operated within the representationalist framework. However, some contemporary approaches do not necessarily operate within this framework. Instead, they utilise approaches such as 4E cognition (embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended cognition – see, for example, Geertz 2010; Geertz and Kundtová Klocová 2019) or a predictive processing approach (see, for example, Andersen 2017; Schjoedt and Andersen 2017; van Elk and Aleman 2017), and thus they overcome several shortcomings of the first CESR theories. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers who pointed out the need to clarify this part of the text.

For many cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion, including Boyer's approach, an important distinction lies between the different types of memory activated during different types of religious rituals and activities (e.g. Boyer 2009; Boyer and Wertsch 2009). Harvey Whitehouse's theory of two modes of religiosity is a concrete example of this approach. According to Whitehouse, we can distinguish two modes of religiosity, namely the imagistic mode and the doctrinal mode. Concrete religions and ritual systems then more or less approximate one of them, with different types of memory being activated in these systems (Whitehouse 2000, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2021). The imagistic mode is predominated by episodic memory, in which personal memories are encoded in the form of distinctive episodes – thus, they are more likely to be specific memories of specific events. Information in this type of long-term memory is embedded in memories of specific situations and linked to the personal identity of the bearer. Examples of this include intense ritual experiences in the form of physically and psychologically demanding extreme rituals or emotionally charged initiation or rites of passage. The doctrinal mode is governed by semantic memory, which stores information about the world (social, cultural, ecological, etc.) through memorisation and the creation of memory schemas. In this mode, information about ritual and religion is stored in semantic memory as general knowledge (Hampejs and Chalupa 2014: 27; Jerotijević and Maňo 2014: 147). Frequently repeated rituals are typical for the doctrinal mode. Rituals and practices closer to this mode are characterised by repetitiveness, routinisation, and the existence of religious experts enforcing participation in rituals and overseeing their uniformity. An illustrative example is the Christian Sunday service or the Islamic daily prayer.

While religious rituals and practices approaching the imagistic mode are characterised by a high degree of physical, psychological, and emotional arousal, practices approaching the doctrinal mode are characterised by the so-called *tedium effect*. It means that performing rituals in doctrinal mode can cause the automatic and routinised performance of ritual activities. These may include, for example, standing up, kneeling, blessing, reciting, and chanting biblical texts, and ritualised responses to acts performed by religious experts during a Christian weekly worship service. This form of ritual can lose its appeal to participants, leading to low participation in frequently repeated rituals, especially those performed on a daily or weekly basis. For this reason, religious authorities oversee the correctness and uniformity of the practices performed and may even try to enforce participation in rituals (Jerotijević and Maňo 2014: 147; Whitehouse 2009: 214). Such enforcement is also documented by ethnographic research on religion carried out in Slovakia (Uhrin 2018: 45).

In this section, I have presented only selected fundamental approaches from the first generation of CESR scholars. This overview does not reflect the current state of CESR's immense methodological and theoretical breadth. To summarise, the approaches from the first wave include the epidemiology of representation (Dan Sperber), animism and anthropomorphism (Stewart Guthrie), ritual representations (E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley), modes of religiosity (Harvey Whitehouse), counterintuitive ideas (Pascal Boyer) and the hyperactive agency detection device (Justin Barrett – which I haven't addressed due to lack of space) (Geertz 2020: 367–368).

Michal Uhrin
Cognitive and Evolutionary Inspirations in the Study
of Religion with Emphasis on the Development of
Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology in Slovakia

Vol. 2, Nr. 2, July 2024

53

Many concepts considered significant in the 1990s and early 2000s, including those referred to above, have later undergone crucial refinement and change. Although CESR is a relatively young theoretical and methodological approach, it is nevertheless rapidly and dynamically advancing. There were significant advancements made in the past three decades, both empirically and theoretically. The research scope of the current wave of CESR scholars is much broader, studying diverse aspects of religiosity such as morality and moral behaviour, atheism, gender, power relations, death and the dead, pilgrimage, embodiment and ritual, and much more (for an overview, see Geertz 2020; Martin and Wiebe 2017; White 2021). While the situation within CESR since the 1990s was characterised by fast progress in both theoretical and methodological terms, the situation in Slovakia was different. As we will see, research on religion from a cognitive and evolutionary perspective developed differently for several reasons.

COGNITIVE AND EVOLUTIONARY SCIENCE OF RELIGION IN SLOVAKIA

Research on religion has not always received systematic attention in Slovak ethnology, and religion, in the sense of one of the great institutionalised religions, has not been the main topic of ethnographers' research. From the 17th and 18th centuries onwards, in the early stages of ethnographic scholarship, researchers focused on manifestations of "folk religiosity", such as ideas about supernatural beings, superstitions, magical ideas and practices, etc. (for more details, see Bužeková 2009, 2019; Bahna 2019; Hlôšková 2008; Urbancová 1987). In the second half of the 20th century, the absence of research on religion was undoubtedly also due to the political regime of the time and the ideology attached to it. As the Slovak ethnologist Zuzana Beňušková explains, after the Second World War, the topic of religion was rather avoided, and although one cannot speak explicitly about the tabooing of the topic, information was "hidden" in contexts of different research topics (Beňušková 2004: 5). Since the 1950s municipal and regional monographs have been published. Despite the minutiae analysis of the diverse manifestations of Slovak folk culture, these monographs mostly lack systematic information on religious life or interfaith relations in the rural environment. I am not suggesting complete neglect, but rather pointing to the absence of systematic research on religion by ethnographic methods in the rural environment until the 1990s (Uhrin 2019).

After the fall of the communist bloc, there was an increase in research on religion in Slovakia in the fields of ethnology and sociocultural anthropology. Since the 1990s, many important publications, synthetic works and articles have been produced about religion. However, researchers faced a difficult challenge as there was little previous research to build upon. Previous research was scarce and varied in quality, as well as in methodological foundations (Beňušková 2004: 4–6) and lacked theoretical background. During this period, scholars mainly focused on precise descriptions, categorisations, and analyses of empirical phenomena. This resulted in a lack of theoretical explanatory frameworks. The insufficiency of theoretical and methodological reasoning in ethnology has been pointed out by sever-

al scholars, including social anthropologist Martin Kanovský, whose works I will discuss below (Kanovský 1998, 2004; see also Boyer 2003, 2011; Bužeková 2009, 2019; Uhrin 2019).

During the 1990s, scientific research in Slovakia saw the introduction of theoretical concepts developed in sociocultural anthropology in Western countries. However, there was no predominant theoretical or methodological approach during this time. I believe that the reason for this is the relatively small number of ethnologists and sociocultural anthropologists in Slovakia and the considerable theoretical diversity entering the former communist bloc countries from the Western scientific traditions in the 1990s. One of the approaches that has emerged in the study of religion in Slovakia since the late 1990s is the cognitive and evolutionary approach.

Cognitive sciences were established in Slovakia towards the end of the 20th century. This establishment was done through computer science, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, anthropology, and ethnology (Beňušková, Kvasnička and Pospíchal 2000; Rybár, Beňušková and Kvasnička 2002). At this time, a small group of ethnologists, anthropologists, and religious scholars in Slovakia started to delve into the concepts of cognitive and evolutionary sciences.[3] One of the pioneers in the CESR field in Slovakia, and the first who was concerned with their application in the ethnographic research of religion was the social anthropologist Martin Kanovský. Among the first proof of this interest is a paper in which Kanovský applies cognitive theories on data drawn from the literature relating to the semantics of Australian Aboriginal religion and its cognitive foundations (Kanovský 1999; also Uhrin 2018, 2019).

In subsequent works, Kanovský analyses the ethnographic material collected during ethnographic field research. Inspired by Boyer's work, he focuses on cognitive explanations of the distribution of some supernatural ideas in the White Carpathian Mountain region in Slovakia (Kanovský 2002a). Drawing on Sperber's conception, he addresses the following research question: why are some sets of supernatural ideas more widespread and remembered than others? This is one of the classic questions in CESR, which has received a considerable amount of attention. In recent years, the term supernatural ideas or entities has been replaced by the term minimally counter-intuitive agents (Hampejs and Chalupa 2014: 29), but only in some specific theoretical frameworks. The counter-intuitiveness refers to the notion that these agents somehow violate our mind's intuitive expectations / intuitive ontology related to psychology, biology, or physics (Boyer 1996). An example of a violation of intuitive expectations might be an inanimate object capable of speaking and thinking, which our minds do not intuitively assume to have these properties – a talking boulder, for example. Another example might be an animal capable of acting in some aspects like a

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[3] Before proceeding any further and addressing the specific works of Slovak scholars, I want to say that I will not go into a detailed explanation of the premises of the cognitive and evolutionary anthropology of religion. A basic outline was given in the previous section. Therefore, I will limit myself exclusively to the characterisation of those terms and concepts employed in the data interpretation. For a more detailed characterisation of the cognitive and evolutionary approach, see, for example, the works of the following scholars: Bahna (2008, 2015a, 2015b), Bužeková (2003, 2004, 2009, 2011), Hampejs and Chalupa (2014), Hrustič (2003); Jerotijević (2013, 2015), Jerotijević and Maňo (2014), Kanovský (1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2011), Lang (2014) or Tužinská (2006).

Michal Uhrin
Cognitive and Evolutionary Inspirations in the Study
of Religion with Emphasis on the Development of
Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology in Slovakia

human, or a human being able to fly on its own. Similar examples of violations of intuitive expectations abound in supernatural religious ideas throughout the world. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some CESR scholars are critical of the usefulness of the original minimal counter-intuitive theory (for discussion, see Purzycki and Willard 2016).

In 2011 Kanovský reflects on his original article mentioned above, refining the various postulates and assumptions as well as the results of his analysis. He does so considering the latest theoretical findings in the field of the cognitive science of religion (Kanovský 2011: 7–21). In the abovementioned article, Kanovský follows Boyer in saying that successfully transmitted religious ideas from one generation to the next must inevitably meet at least two criteria. First, they must be relatively easily remembered by the human mind – the so-called attention-grabbing potential. Second, the idea must be integrated with other ideas and usable to explain events, whether natural or social – the so-called inferential potential (Kanovský 2011: 8–9). However, Kanovský and Boyer, along with many others, acknowledge that other conditions must be met for the successful transmission of supernatural ideas. They also note that, in addition to cognitive factors, the dissemination of supernatural ideas is influenced by social, cultural, historical, ecological, economic, and other factors. Boyer goes on to show, as Kanovský says, that all religious ideas are effectively a combination of two elements. First, they somehow violate intuitive expectations about the object of that idea. Second, these ideas have great inferential, that is, explanatory potential (Kanovský 2011: 8–9). In ethnographic research, these theoretical predictions can then be tested on specific sets of supernatural ideas. Supernatural ideas spontaneously transmitted in a population are likely to meet these two abovementioned conditions, among others.[4] Kanovský also argues that it is not enough just to prove that supernatural concepts meet these criteria. It must also be shown that supernatural concepts meeting these criteria are more widespread in a particular population than others. This last condition was often absent, according to him, not only in early CESR work around the world but also in Slovakia.

I believe that the first article by Kanovský is important because it presents some fundamental theories of cognitive anthropology and deals directly with their application and testing in ethnographic research in the rural environment in Slovakia. We can likewise say that this paper, and all other following works in this strand of research, effectively demonstrate the applicability of cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion in ethnographic research – either as a starting point from which hypotheses were formulated or as an interpretive framework (e.g. Bužeková 2009).

Following Kanovský's work, scholars have applied cognitive and evolutionary theories to research topics such as magic and supernatural harm (Jerotijević 2011, 2013), witchcraft, supernatural beliefs, and supernatural harm (Bahna 2008; Bužeková 2003, 2004,

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It should be pointed out that religions also contain representations that have little inferential potential and a large degree of violation of intuitive expectations. However, these ideas rarely spread spontaneously, and their spread is largely conditioned by 1) dissemination through religious experts and during religious rituals, and 2) the existence of scriptures and religious texts in which these ideas are explained.

2009), neo-shamanism (Bužeková 2011, 2023), and ritual (Bahna 2022a, 2022b; Bahna and Talmont-Kaminski 2022; Jerotijević and Maňo 2014; Maňo and Xygalatas 2022; Mentel 2022a, 2022b). In the early days of cognitive and evolutionary research of religion, however, attention was paid mainly to two interrelated themes: 1) cognitive research of supernatural ideas and how they violate innate intuitive expectations, 2) ideas of supernatural harm and the topic of magical thinking. To a lesser extent, research also focused on cognitive aspects of the coexistence of spontaneously transmitted non-institutionalised forms of religion and institutionalised doctrinal forms of religion (Bahna 2019: 10). Several scholars have also paid attention to the theoretical and methodological aspects of this line of research (e.g. Hrustič 2003; Tužinská 2006). This reflection and analysis are significant because they presented the basic postulates of cognitive anthropology and Boyer's conception to a broader audience of ethnologists and sociocultural anthropologists in Slovakia.

Tatiana Bužeková has investigated various subtopics concerning cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion. For instance, in her research on Neo-Shamanism (urban shamanism), Bužeková applies Boyer's concept of traditional discourse to analyse the types of authority of leaders in urban Neo-Shamanic groups. However, she also examines gender stratification and the dynamics of gender relations in the context of Neo-Shamanism (Bužeková 2011, 2015, 2023). She also addresses the issue of religious expertise in the context of the coexistence of supernatural and religious ideas, in the context of Christianity in rural Slovakia (Bužeková 2009, 2021). In these works, she develops the idea that in every society's official organised religion, there are ideas that contain supernatural elements that are not part of the official religion. However, the relationship between these supernatural elements and the dominant religion can vary depending on social and historical conditions. The explanation for this phenomenon may lie in the characteristics of human thought and in the way our memory functions (Bužeková 2021: 78–79). Laypeople, unlike religious experts, do not verify the consistency of supernatural ideas and official religious doctrine. This may be due, among other factors, to the different ways of acquiring knowledge about official doctrine and the different types of memory, episodic and semantic, in which this information is stored – we can recall that these ideas were also developed in Harvey Whitehouse's theory of two modes of religiosity (Bužeková 2003, 2004, 2021; also Bahna 2008; Uhrin 2018, 2019).

Another thematic area in Bužeková's work concerns witchcraft and supernatural harm in the rural environment in Slovakia. Bužeková has presented the results of many years of ethnographic research conducted in the White Carpathian Mountains in a seminal publication that has contributed to understanding not only the cognitive and evolutionary aspects of accusations of witchcraft and supernatural harm but also their social and cultural dimensions (Bužeková 2009). In her book, Bužeková mentions that her goal is not to confirm any hypotheses that might have arisen from the cognitive theories of religion. Rather, she intends to interpret the ethnographic material from the perspective of cognitive anthropology and draw partial conclusions that might encourage further research on the topic of witchcraft (Bužeková 2009: 8–9). The results presented by Bužeková support the widespread idea that accusations of witchcraft and supernatural harm reflect social tensions and conflicts. The

author's interest in the topics of magic and witchcraft is evident in her later book, which provides a comprehensive overview of the history of research on magic and witchcraft in worldwide sociocultural anthropology, as well as ethnography in Slovakia (Bužeková 2019).

One of the prominent researchers in Slovakia, who focuses on the study of magic and supernatural harm, is social anthropologist Danijela Jerotijević. She employs selected evolutionary, cognitive, and psychological theories of religion in her research on supernatural harm, magic and witchcraft. She attempts to demonstrate that magical practices that aim to harm someone, like the evil eye, rely on common psychological mechanisms and may be a by-product of their work. Jerotijević emphasizes that her explanatory model primarily focuses on the principles that affect the functioning of magical practices and not just on their content (Jerotijević 2011: 22–74, 2013: 27–43, 2015: 161–175). For a long time, the dominant research approach in Slovak ethnology focused mainly on the content, symbolic aspects, and cataloguing of magical practices and ideas. In contrast, cognitive and evolutionary directions seek not only to give detailed descriptions of specific social and cultural phenomena but also to explain how the mechanisms (psychological, cognitive, evolutionary, social, or cultural) that influence their transmission, acquisition, credibility, or memorability work.

Social anthropologist Vladimír Bahna is another representative of the CESR approach among Slovak scholars. In his book from 2019, he focuses on narratives of personal experiences with supernatural entities in which the narrator is also a protagonist of the story, and which reflect his memories. Bahna presents ethnographic material collected mainly in the Upper Kysuce region in the northwest of Slovakia. The core of the ethnographic data in the book consists of narratives of encounters with supernatural beings, which were presented as personal experiences. The publication also focuses on supernatural representations coexisting with the established 'official' Christian religion – one of CESR's classic areas of research (Bahna 2019). The underlying theoretical approach in the book is Dan Sperber's epidemiology of representation (Bahna 2019: 11). However, Bahna employs other cognitive theories of religion, as well as concepts derived from cognitive narratology, cognitive psychology, and evolutionary psychology, creating a comprehensive explanatory framework.

As I stated in a review of this book, Bahna's aim is not only to map the repertoire of a supernatural experience in a particular region. That is, his intention is not simply to conduct ethnographic empirical research, and subsequent categorisation, cataloguing, and follow-up analysis. He aims to investigate a certain cultural phenomenon in the context of knowledge about the functioning of the human mind. Moreover, by focusing attention on the theme of personal experiences and unexpected encounters with the supernatural, it fills a certain gap. So far, no systematic attention has been paid to this topic from the perspective of cognitive and evolutionary sciences in Slovakia (Uhrin 2021: 105–107).

The works mentioned so far illustrate a broader trend of research focusing on "superstitions" or "folk religiosity". According to Vladimír Bahna, this is a consequence of the fact that the central cognitive theories of religion mentioned above are based on knowledge of the spontaneous and intuitive mechanisms of the mind. They are also applied, according to Bahna, primarily, though not exclusively, in research of non-institutionalised or non-literal forms

of religion. This is why, in his view, the focus on "folk religiosity" in the early days of cognitive and evolutionary research on religion in Slovakia is both natural and logical (Bahna 2019: 10).

However, the Slovak researchers mentioned above have shown innovative thinking by combining cognitive and classical anthropological theories in the study of religion. For example, both Bužeková and Jerotijević combined the classical study of witchcraft, magic and magical harm, inspired by J. G. Frazer, E. E. Evans-Pritchard or M. Douglas, with current cognitive theories of religion and psychological theories related to magic, and magical thinking, essentialist reasoning or emotions, among others (Bužeková 2009; Jerotijević 2011, 2013, 2015). Also, Vladimír Bahna combined the approaches of the cognitive science of religion and cognitive narratology in the research of narratives of encounters with supernatural beings presented as personal experiences. He argues that such integration of theoretical concepts is plausible because "cognitive narratology and cognitive science of religion often build on similar evolutionary starting points." (Bahna 2019: 18–19).

The presented research topics are not the only ones that scholars in Slovakia have been creatively exploring. In addition to these, they have also been looking into the coexistence of supernatural beliefs and official religion, the interaction between religious experts and laypersons, religious expertise, narrative folklore from the perspective of cognitive theories, alternative spirituality, collective rituals, gender, memory and several other topics. In some ways, this line of research is like that conducted by CESR scholars abroad, but it also expands into new areas of inquiry. It can be said that in several cases Slovak researchers have gone beyond the established cognitive theories of religion and have actively incorporated psychological findings to draw theoretical implications for the study of culture. I believe that it could even be argued that these researchers have expanded the scope of research beyond the mainstream of CESR.

I also believe that these works, as well as many others in this research direction in Slovakia, are a great demonstration of how CESR approaches can bring new explanatory insights to classical topics such as magic and supernatural harm, and religious expertise, which have been addressed by doyens of sociocultural anthropology such as James George Frazer, Marcel Mauss, Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard or Mary Douglas, among many others. Although critical of the previous theoretical and methodological approaches of classic sociocultural anthropologist and ethnologists, contemporary researchers have drawn inspiration from their works in multiple ways. This also applies to the study of rituals and ritualisation which constitutes another of the main research themes in CESR. These have also received considerable attention from Slovak scholars, and I will address them in the subsequent section.

RITUALS FROM THE EVOLUTIONARY AND COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

Ritual is one of the classic and most researched topics in ethnology, sociocultural anthropology, religious studies, sociology, and psychology. Religious rituals have been a popular topic of research in sociocultural anthropology since the pioneering work of French sociologist

Émile Durkheim (1995 [1915]). Over the years, they have been studied from different theoretical perspectives, ranging from early theories of cultural evolution, structuralism, and symbolic anthropology to contemporary approaches (Bell 1997). In the 1950s, symbolic and cognitive theories of rituals began to develop in anthropology as researchers shifted from studying institutional behaviour to studying 'idea systems' or 'symbolic systems' (D'Andrade 1995: 12). The underlying assumption is that the human mind comprises cognitive and psychological processes built by natural selection to solve the adaptive problems faced by our ancestors. Sociocultural phenomena, including rituals, cannot be comprehensively explained without considering these psychological mechanisms that underlie human behaviour. However, the explanation must always consider the specific cultural context (Boyer 2001; Sperber 1975, 1996). The focus on cognitive processes did not mean that the cultural and social aspects of rituals were ignored: quite the contrary, in general, cognitive and evolutionary anthropologists have been inspired by Durkheim's view of collective religious rituals as a tool for social integration, cohesion, and the maintenance of cooperation.

It has been argued that religion plays an important role in the evolution and functioning of cooperation. Durkheim and other classics concerned with ritual such as Victor Turner (1995 [1969]) or Roy Rappaport (1999), among others, understood the function of religion in society differently to a degree. However, they more or less agreed that religion and participation in rituals promote cooperation, prosociality, moral behaviour in people, and the willingness to help or sacrifice for the benefit of others. These ideas are also reflected in contemporary cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion. However, they are developed in a more sophisticated form. Durkheim's notion has been reflected in evolutionary studies that have shown that participation in religious rituals promotes cooperation and prosociality. Through participation, individuals signal to other group members a commitment to group membership, adherence to group norms, and willingness to cooperate and contribute to activities beneficial to the group, and also signal (communicate) their honesty and trustworthiness (Bulbulia 2004; Henrich 2009; Power 2016; Sosis 2003; Sosis and Alcorta 2003; Whitehouse 2021; Xygalatas 2022).

Another important concept fundamentally influencing the study of rituals in CESR is the costly signalling theory. Since Charles Darwin introduced his theory of evolution through natural and sexual selection, signalling has been a key subject of research in ethology and biology (Darwin 1859, 1871; Ridley 2007; Zahavi 1975; Zahavi and Zahavi 1997) but also in sociocultural anthropology and CESR (e.g. Henrich 2009; Irons 2001; Lang and Kundt 2020; Sosis 2004; Sosis and Alcorta 2003; Xygalatas 2022). The costly signalling theory assumes that some types of behaviour are so costly that it would be disadvantageous to perform them without sharing the norms, attitudes, and beliefs of the group that holds them (Jerotijević and Maňo 2014: 156; Zahavi and Zahavi 1997). Ritual participation can be seen as a type of signalling, and the signals are divided into those with high frequency and low cost, and those with low frequency and high cost. The costs can represent different forms of capital, including physical, financial, material, social, and cultural, being spent during ritual or capital foregone. However, the form of cost and frequency of rituals depend

on the religious context. In Christianity, for example, attending a Sunday service mass is a low-cost, high-frequency signal, while a full-fletched religious pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is a low-frequency, high-cost signal (Chvaja et al. 2023; Uhrin and Bužeková 2022;). Significant attention has also been paid to extreme rituals, usually low frequency and high cost types of rituals, which are characterised by a significant degree of physical, psychological, and emotional strain, and may represent an intense experience of fear and pain and are characterised by intense discomfort. Typical components of extreme rituals may include exposing oneself to the extreme cold or walking on fire, starving oneself, piercing body parts with needles and hooks, or performing other potentially health-threatening activities (Maňo 2019; Maňo and Xygalatas 2022; Xygalatas 2012, 2022). The question that arises in this context is how the act of participating in rituals is interpreted by their performers and onlookers, and what potential benefits their performance brings to those who perform them. It is important to understand what qualities and intentions are conveyed and communicated by the performer through their participation, and how to ensure that these signals are credible and honest communicative acts.

Various researchers from Slovakia researching rituals have adopted a cognitive approach and evolutionary anthropological theories and tried to answer many of the above-mentioned research questions (Bahna 2022a; Bahna and Talmont-Kaminski 2022; Maňo and Xygalatas 2022; Mentel 2022a, 2022b; Uhrin and Bužeková 2022). Slovak researchers were part of international research teams that studied the ritual practices on the island of Mauritius. The island is known for its costly extreme religious rituals and ceremonies – e.g. *Thaipusam Kavadi*, *Maha Shivaratri* and the *Ganesh Chaturthi* (e.g. Maňo and Xygalatas 2022; Xygalatas et al. 2021). One example may be the research focused on signalling and social status in the ritual of *Thaipusam Kavadi*. In this study, the collective of authors focused on the intensity of signalling by examining how socioeconomic status affects the cost of religious signals and investigated whether participants of different socioeconomic statuses would assume differential costs (Xygalatas et al. 2021: 525). The authors concluded that socio-economic factors play a crucial role in determining the form and intensity of signalling across different modalities in the context of the *Thaipusam Kavadi* on the island of Mauritius (Xygalatas et al. 2021: 529).

Another example is a study by Maňo and Xygalatas that focused on ritual exegesis. The authors explored the relationship between ritual costs and the perception of ritual efficacy. They assumed that the costlier rituals would be considered more adequate for addressing important problems in the lives of research participants. They found out that their respondents consider some ritual practices better and more effective than others for addressing major problems. Further, according to their research certain ritual practices are believed to be more effective in tackling significant life issues than others. These practices typically involve greater financial, physical, emotional, and opportunity investments/costs, and participating in them is often more binding – if it is based on a promise given to the deity (Maňo and Xygalatas 2022: 88). These results suggest that people may find more costly rituals to be more effective means to achieve goals than less costly ones in particular contexts.

Michal Uhrin
Cognitive and Evolutionary Inspirations in the Study
of Religion with Emphasis on the Development of
Ethnology and Sociocultural Anthropology in Slovakia

A signalling approach to the study of rituals has also been implemented by Bužeková and Uhrin, who examined the role of rituals in the recruitment of new members into a religious community in the specific sociocultural circumstances of a village in western Slovakia. They claim that even low-cost and high-frequency signals can be perceived as trustworthy signals that communicate the intention to become a member of the group, the willingness to invest resources in activities beneficial for the group, or the willingness to comply with religious and local norms (Uhrin and Bužeková 2022). Another example of cognitive and evolutionary research on ritual by Slovak researchers is the work of Andrej Mentel. In his ethnographic case study from 2022, he compared the ritual practice of three confessional communities in contemporary Bosnia – Sunni Muslims, Roman Catholics, and Sufi dervishes. These communities implement different degrees of synchronisation and rhythmic activities in their ritual practice. Mentel states that the group with the most synchronisation of body movements during their rituals would have the highest in-group solidarity (Mentel 2022a: 228–233).

CONCLUSION

A vast amount of empirical and theoretical work has been written in recent decades examining religion and ritual from every conceivable theoretical and methodological perspective. Since about the 1990s, the cognitive and evolutionary study of religion has slowly been developing. The last few decades have seen a boom in the cognitive, evolutionary and naturalistic study of religion, magic, mythology, and ritual. From this perspective, researchers pay attention to the laws of functioning and mechanisms of the human mind and the selection pressures that have shaped them during the evolution of the human species. In addition, they consider cultural, social, historical, economic or ecological aspects in scientific research on religion in equal measure. Cognitive and evolutionary approaches do not form the dominant trends in ethnology and anthropology whether abroad or in Slovakia. Nevertheless, they have captured the attention of a narrow group of scholars who apply them to a diverse range of topics.

In this paper, I did not intend to provide a comprehensive account of evolutionary and cognitive approaches to the study of religion. This is because the scope of such a goal is quite vast. Instead, I aimed to briefly introduce the general postulates of the first wave of cognitive and evolutionary theories of religion and highlight the work of selected scholars. Additionally, I wanted to show that these theories are reflected by a narrow group of ethnologists and sociocultural anthropologists in Slovakia, who expanded upon them in many creative ways. To conclude, I would like to paraphrase Vladimír Bahna, who states that at the beginning of the development of CESR, the interested researcher only had to follow the work of some thirty or so scholars – I have referenced the works of several of them in the paper – to have an almost complete picture of the theoretical and methodological advancements in the field. Today, Bahna continues, something like that is virtually impossible (Bahna 2022b: 305). Due to its multidisciplinary nature, CESR is a dynamic and rapidly developing field, bringing new impulses to the classic topic of scientific inquiry. CESR rep-

resents just one contemporary approach to the study of religion. However, I hope this text encourages scholars to explore its theoretical and methodological aspects further.

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Michal Uhrin
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Vol. 2, Nr. 2, July 2024   65

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POVZETEK

Antropologi se že desetletja osredotočajo na religijo in razvijajo teorije, s katerimi skušajo razložiti njene številne vidike. Kognitivni in evolucijski pristop do proučevanja religije se je pričel razvijati v sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja, nanj pa je vplivala druga kognitivna revolucija. Kognitivne in evolucijske znanosti so na področju raziskovanja religije pripeljale do prepričljivih novih vpogledov. Ob koncu devetdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja so kognitivne in evolucijske teorije religije začeli v raziskavah religije uporabljati predstavniki ozke skupine etnologov, religiologov in antropologov na Slovaškem. Avtorji so raziskali teme, kot so versko strokovno znanje, neošamanizem v urbanem okolju, magija in nadnaravna škoda ter koeksistenca ljudskih verovanj o nadnaravnem in krščanstva. Ta vidik omogoča raziskovalcem vpogled v mehanizme in zakonitosti delovanja človeškega uma ter selekcijske pritiske, ki so jih v evoluciji človeške vrste oblikovali. Poleg tega v enaki meri upoštevajo kulturne, družbene, zgodovinske, ekonomske ali ekološke vidike.

V članku je podan pregled temeljnih konceptov kognitivne in evolucijske antropologije religije. Osredotoča se na strokovnjake, katerih dela in ideje veljajo za ključne pri razvoju tega področja. To sicer lahko pomeni, da nekateri članki, knjige ali raziskave morda ne bodo omenjeni, vendar pa je namen članka preko primerov specifičnih raziskovalnih interesov izpostaviti širše splošne trende v razvoju kognitivnega in evolucijskega pristopa do

proučevanja religije. Drugi cilj je pokazati, kako se kognitivne in evolucijske teorije religije odražajo v etnologiji in sociokulturni antropologiji na Slovaškem. Prispevek vključuje ne le empirične raziskave, v katerih so te teorije uporabljene, ampak tudi študije, ki odražajo teoretične in metodološke vidike kognitivnih in evolucijskih pristopov k proučevanju religije. Kljub temu, da niti v tujini niti na Slovaškem kognitivni in evolucijski pristopi niso dominantni trend v etnologiji in antropologiji, so uspeli pritegnili pozornost ozke skupine strokovnjakov, ki jih uporabljajo za raziskovanje raznovrstnih tem.

Malinowski's Formative Contribution to American Folklore Studies

Malinowski in njegov formativni prispevek k ameriški folkloristiki

Frank J. Korom

ABSTRACT

Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942) was a foundational force in the development of functionalist theory in the discipline of anthropology. Based on intensive fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, his pragmatic theory stimulated much discussion and debate in anthropological circles. Lesser known, however, is the influence that Malinowski had on the development of modern performance studies in the United States among folklore scholars. This research note focuses on Malinowski's writings concerning the language of myth and magic, since these were the aspects of his work that appealed most to American scholars of performance in the 1970s.

KEYWORDS: context, ethnography, folkloristics, language philosophy, magic, myth, performance. sociolinguistics, text

IZVLEČEK

Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942) je bil osrednjega pomena pri razvoju teorije funkcionalizma v antropologiji. Njegova pragmatična teorija, ki je nastala na podlagi intenzivnega terenskega dela na Trobriandskih otokih, je v antropoloških krogih spodbudila mnogo razprav. Manj znan pa je vpliv, ki ga je Malinowski imel na razvoj sodobnih študij performativne umetnosti v Združenih državah med folkloristi. Ta raziskovalni zapis se osredotoča na njegovo pisanje o jeziku mita in magije, vidikih njegovega dela, ki so v sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja najbolj pritegnili ameriške raziskovalce performansa.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: kontekst, folkloristika, filozofija jezika, magija, mit, performans, sociolingvistika, besedilo

INTRODUCTION

Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942) was a formative force in the development of functionalist theory in the discipline of anthropology. Based on intensive fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, his pragmatic theory stimulated much discussion and debate in anthropological circles, as is well known.[1] Lesser known is the influence that Malinowski had on the development of modern folklore studies in the United States.[2] This brief essay focuses on Malinowski's writings concerning the language of myth and magic because these two genres of his work appealed most to American folklorists in the 1970s. It was during the seventies that the academic study of folklore was being reconfigured, since it moved away from purely textual studies and adopted a more contextual and ethnographic approach that took oral performances as the primary data of analysis. I argue that Malinowski directly influenced the then so-called "young Turks" of folklore studies in the seventies.[3] His philosophy of language and his emphasis on situational meaning were especially influential in the construction of a new form of folklore studies that became widely known as "folkloristics."[4] Malinowski's oft-quoted dictum to "listen to the natives" became a key rallying point around which the contemporary discipline of folkloristics developed.

The essay is divided into three sections. Section one briefly surveys the works of Malinowski that are most relevant to the formulation of modern folkloristics. The second section explores the development of folkloristics in the 1970s, focusing on those ideas that were influenced centrally by Malinowski. The final section synthesizes the information presented in the first two sections to suggest that while most scholars have moved beyond Malinowski's functionalism, many of his seminal ideas are still very much a part of the folkloristic canon. What folklorists do when they conduct ethnographic fieldwork, as well as when they analyze the results of their research after returning from the field, is indebted to Malinowski's emphasis on grasping the "native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world" (Malinowski 1922: 25).

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[1]
On his general contribution to anthropology, see, for example, Firth (1957) and more recently Young (2002). For an extended meditation on his philosophy of language, see Gellner (1998). However, Langendoen's 1968 study of his anthropological linguistics remains the standard and definitive analysis, and it is his work that primarily informs the first section here.

[2]
It was the Africanist William Bascom (1912-1981) who had first pointed out Malinowski's relevance to contemporary American folkloristics in a posthumous essay published in 1983 that he delivered in 1980 during the inauguration of a new undergraduate major in folklore studies at The Ohio State University. However, he focused solely on one monograph published by Malinowski titled *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926), which was reprinted in 1948 in a more accessible anthology titled *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays by Bronislaw Malinowski.* See Redfield (1948). Bascom is best known for introducing the term "verbal art" in 1955, which forecasted the future direction American folklore studies would take by emphasizing the performance of oral tradition. See Bascom (1955).

[3]
The term was coined in 1972 by the doyen of American folklore studies Richard M. Dorson (1916-1981) to refer to a breakaway group of scholars who emphasized the context of folklore over the folkloric text. For the background, see Ben-Amos (1989) and Gabbert (1999). A good, general overview of the early development of the study of folklore in the United States is, for example, Darnell (1973) and Zumwalt (1988) provides a more comprehensive analysis.

[4]
On the debate over the term, see Jackson (1985) and Hansen (1987).

Malinowski's grand task of seriously listening to the people being studied is to be accomplished through ethnographic fieldwork based on three principles. First, the fieldworker must document the organization of the community and the anatomy of its culture. Second, within this framework, the ethnographer must fill in what he called the *imponderabilia* of actual life and document behavior on the ground. Finally, "a collection of ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folk-lore and magical formulae has to be given as a *corpus inscriptionum*, as documents of native mentality" (Malinowski 1922: 24). It is the last point that is most relevant to the development of modern folkloristics, and I should like to return to it shortly, but first, let us turn our attention to Malinowski's work on language.

MALINOWSKI'S LANGUAGE WORK

We know from Malinowski's diary (1967) that he was initially not competent in any of the relevant, local languages when he arrived at Port Moresby in British New Guinea during his first expedition in 1914. This notwithstanding, he did take a keen interest in linguistics and studied no less than four Melanesian languages during his Pacific sojourns. Eventually he even came to influence what is known as the London School of Linguistics through its founder John Rupert Firth (1890-1960).[5] Indeed, an early paper written by Malinowski, published in 1921, was devoted to the study of Kiriwinian classificatory particles.[6] In it, he stressed the need for a general semantic theory of language that would delve deeper into structure than past studies had. Delving deeper, according to Malinowski, required the linguist to bring ethnographic data and theory to bear on language use. Without understanding language in action, the early Malinowski felt that it would be impossible to describe formally the grammar of any given language or even to classify words into parts of speech behavior (Malinowski 1921: 78; Langendoen 1968: 7-8). Hence, he felt it necessary for the linguist to engage in what he termed "excursions into ethnography." Malinowski writes, "When defining the meaning and function of several of the formatives, we had to make excursions into ethnography, describe customs, and state social conditions" (Malinowski 1921: 78).

Terence Langendoen has isolated twelve excursions made by Malinowski in the article under consideration here. He concludes his extensive study by suggesting that this early article relies on "explanation after the fact" (Langendoen 1968: 11). In other words, using ethnography to explain linguistic facts is simply "anecdotal" at best from a formalist's point of view. From a formalist perspective, then, no theoretical assertion can be made to suggest that cultural facts explain the existence of specific rules of grammar (ibid). This may very well be the case from a structuralist's viewpoint, but as we shall see, Malinowski's emphasis

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[5] Firth participated in seminars conducted by Malinowski at the University of London in the 1930s. See Robins (1961). For Firth's own opinion on Malinowski's contribution to linguistics, see Firth (1957).

[6] This was, in fact, his first linguistic publication. See Langendoen (1968): 10.

on the "context of situation" had an impact on the sociolinguistic turn taken by American folklorists in the 1970s.[7] In terms of anthropological linguistics, Malinowski's context of situation implies that grammatical and semantic description must be done within the broader framework of a complete ethnographic description of the culture in question. Before getting into that terrain, let us further explore the development of Malinowski's theories of language.

In his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, published in 1922, Malinowski pays less attention to language use, but does dedicate a chapter of thirty-four pages to the magical power of words. Langendoen has pointed out that because he understands the order of words in sentences to reflect the order of ideas in the mind Malinowski is taking a rather traditional position on discursive meaning (Langendoen 1968: 14). In the chapter on magic Malinowski argues that incantations uttered in the performance of magical acts are exceptions to linguistic rules.[8] In his essay *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages* (2023) however, the paper he published just a year after *Argonauts* was released, Malinowski presents a radically different point of view on language. In a complete reversal of his position in *Argonauts*, magical language now exemplifies the basic and primary use of language.[9] Any utterance is a mode of action; hence, meaning is utterly dependent on situational context. As he writes, "Exactly as in the reality of spoken or written languages, a word without *linguistic context* is a mere figment and stands for nothing by itself, so in the reality of a spoken living tongue, the utterance has no meaning except in the context of situation" (Malinowski 1923: 307). In other words, Malinowski's logic is that because magical texts do not translate well, one must look at what people are doing while the text is being recited. Meaning is thus constituted by the correlation of utterance and action. Language is therefore performance oriented. Although the concept in and of itself is interesting, Malinowski was never able to prove that the meaning of utterances is definitively related to the contexts of situation.[10]

The problem is this: Malinowski's theory in 1923 was based on experience. So, since one cannot know the correlation between utterance and action until it is experienced, communication can break down even within the same culture. For example, if a culture's language has a trade jargon used by masons, does that mean that other occupational groups within the same community would not be able to communicate with masons? Or, to place it back in Malinowski's field context, a Trobriander who has never fished before would not be able to understand Trobriand fishermen speaking, if we follow Malinowski's linguistic lead to the letter of the law. This is the problem that formalists have pointed out regarding Malinowski's theory of language, for he pushes the context of situation argument too far.

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[7]
Relying heavily on sociolinguistics, it is often referred to as the "ethnography of speaking." For an early usage of the phrase and its explication, see Hymes (1962).

[8]
Also of interest to folklorists is his use of interlinear transcription and translation *in tandem,* as well as free translation and his focus on the aesthetics of performance.

[9]
Langendoen (1968): 16, however, suggests that the shift was already anticipated in *Argonauts.*

[10]
See Langendoen (1968): 17-25 again for a trenchant critique.

Malinowski's last major work on language was the second volume of *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, which was titled *The Language of Magic and Gardening* (1935). Not much has changed in his views from 1923 to 1935, but he is now more convinced than ever that the context of situation is essential to linguistic theory. As in *Argonauts*, he is once again concerned with translation. His goal now is to devise a method of linguistic analysis that interprets foreign language texts as accurately as possible in the language of the analyst or ethnographer. To this end, he puts forth three essential ideas relating to the context of situation:

> 1. Isolated words are only linguistic figments, and even sentences cannot be regarded as a "full linguistic datum." He writes, "To us, the real linguistic fact is the full utterance within its context of situation" (Malinowski 1935: 11).
> 2. Any word can have a "range of meanings." According to this principle, a sound used in two different contexts is only homophonous and cannot be considered one word. He writes: "Meaning is not something which abides within a sound; it exists in the sound's relation to the context. Hence if a word is used in a different context, it cannot have the same meaning; it ceases to be one word and becomes two or more semantically distinguishable units" (Malinowski 1935: 31).
> 3. A rejection of his earlier claim that there is a deep underlying connection between mental categories and the categorical structure of the language's vocabulary. Hence, he rejects much of his earlier arguments, but continues to adhere to the contextual position.

The second point is the one that concerns me here the most because it touches on the concept of "emergence."[11] This notion is built on the premise that because context constantly shifts and changes, no two performances are ever the same, since the dialogical interaction between the performers and their audiences vary each time a performance event occurs. Thus, meaning must be constantly negotiated among the participants engaged in the expressive act, thereby changing to suit the specific context in which the act is being negotiated.[12] Emergence theory plays a key role in Malinowski's analysis of coral garden magical language and in the new folkloristics to which I will return shortly. But it is not difficult to see the problem inherent in the argument when taken to an extreme. Langendoen notes the implications of Malinowski's late view in the following quote: "… every time a particular word is uttered it occurs in a novel verbal context, therefore no two utterance tokens of the same word ever have the same meaning, and conversely, it often happens that two different words occur as utterance tokens in the same context, therefore they must be considered synonymous in those contexts" (Langendoen 1968: 31). Langendoen concludes his study of Malinowski's ideas concerning language by pointing out a flaw; namely, that Malinowski considered the relationship between lived experience and derived concepts to be a direct one (Langendoen 1968: 34). Langendoen's conclusions may remain open to debate, but my concern here in outlining Malinowski's changing theories of language is simply to point out some of his insights that would later be incorporated into folkloristic theory and method. To do this thoroughly, we must also mention Malinowski's own interest in folklore.

11
On the concept of emergence, see Georges (1969).

12
For a good example of this, see Schieffelin (1985).

I noted earlier that Malinowski considered it essential to collect and analyze "characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folk-lore and magical formulae," the constituents of what he termed the *corpus inscriptionum* of a culture, before we are even able to approximate the "native's point of view."[13] In virtually all of Malinowski's book-length works, he uses genres of folklore effectively in his ethnographic portraits. In *Argonauts*, for example, chapter XII is devoted to the mythology of the Kula, chapter XVII is devoted to their magical practices, and as already mentioned above, chapter XVIII is devoted to the power of words in magical acts. In his 1927 monograph *The Father in Primitive Psychology* (1927a), he uses "words and deeds in testimony" to make his point, while in his *Foundations of Faith and Morals* (1936) he states that "when I first went there [i.e., Trobriand Islands] I knew that every good ethnographer must collect 'folk-lore'" (Malinowski 1936: 10).[14] Here again he emphasizes the importance of context. He continues by writing the following:

> I was eagerly writing down any story which was told to me by a native. I collected tales about ogres and flying canoes, about malicious stepmothers and daring sailors, about the beginnings of magic and the queer pranks of an avaricious harlot. Gradually, however, it dawned on me that the natives themselves were aware of points in the performance which I was constantly missing; for I was collecting texts but disregarding contexts. In the course of time, I realized that the manner of telling a story and the way in which it was received, the circumstances under which the story was told and its immediate and also indirect influence, were quite as important as the text itself. (ibid)

Even in his earlier work *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, published in 1927, he discusses folklore "in relation to the typical sentiments of the matrilineal family" (Malinowski 1927b: 104) as a way of bridging psychoanalysis and anthropology. But nowhere did Malinowski state his reliance on folklore more specifically than in his 1926 Frazer Lecture titled *Myth in Primitive Psychology*.[15] Here he states very plainly his contextually dependent theory of performance: "The stories live in a native life and not on paper, and when a scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality" (Redfield 1948: 104). This statement has been quoted often by the seventies' folklorists as a kind of rallying cry for context sensitive studies in folklore as a viable strategy for transcending the limitations of analyzing items of folklore frozen in printed form, so it is worth quoting at greater length:

> We are not so much concentrating our attention on the text of the narrative, as on their sociological reference. The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless. As we have seen, the interest of the story is vastly enhanced, and it is given its proper character by the manner in which it is told. The whole nature of the performance, the voice and the mimicry,

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[13]
A term made famous by the late Clifford Geertz (1926-2006). See his 1974 essay titled *'From a Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding.*

[14]
The Trobriand Islands is a 170 square mile archipelago off the east coast of Papua New Guinea belonging to Milne Bay Province. The main island is Kiriwina, where most of the indigenous population of approximately 12,000 people lives.

[15]
Reprinted in Redfield (1948): 93-148. Citations in this paper are from the reprint.

the stimulus and response of the audience mean as much to the natives as the texts; and the socio-logist should take his cue from the natives. The performance, again, has to be placed in its proper time setting—the hour of the day, the season, with the background of the sprouting gardens awaiting future work, and slightly influenced by the magic of the fairy tales. We must also bear in mind the sociological context of private ownership, the sociable function and the cultural role of amusing fiction. All these elements are equally relevant; all must be studied as well as the text. (ibid)

It is immediately after the above passage that his oft-quoted sentence concerning a "mutilated bit of reality" occurs.

To make his point about context sensitivity, Malinowski engaged in genre analysis, delimiting indigenous categories of narrative before concluding that *lili'u* was the closest thing to the western concept of myth because it was regarded as true, venerable and sacred, and often associated with ritual. The emic (insider) point of view is, of course, always a valid and appropriate place at which to begin. However, as Lauri Honko (1968: 57-59) has indicated, Malinowski's exhaustive classification of Trobriand stories transcends the indigenous nomenclature that he wishes to describe by shifting from native terminology to a western, anthropological nominal system before adequately dealing with the ethnic genres themselves, such as in the extended quote above, where he uses the English term "fairy tale" without adequate expla-nation.[16] Such shortcomings notwithstanding, Malinowski paved the way for more refined studies of genres in future years.[17] Moreover, his emphasis on oral performance has pro-foundly influenced not only folklorists but also notable anthropologists such as, for example, Stanley Tambiah, Pierre Bourdieu, and Mary Douglas. Let us move on, then, to explore some of the developments in folklore studies that occurred during the late sixties and seventies.

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN FOLKLORISTICS

The history of the development of folklore studies in North America can generally be char-acterized by a dichotomy of interests. Early anthropological folklorists, such as Franz Boas (1858-1942) and those working for the Bureau of American Ethnology, emphasized the social context and function of folkloric items, while literary scholars such as Francis Child (1825-1896) stressed the textual and aesthetic content. Moreover, the anthropological camp was mostly concerned with indigenous culture, while the literary camp remained primarily focused on the folklore of European immigrant groups and the diffusion of folkloric items from Europe to the New World. By the 1960s, when an interdisciplinary approach incor-porating both the social sciences and the humanities started emerging, a fusion of interests took place in folkloristic circles.

The fusion was already incipient in Albert Lord's classic study *The Singer of Tales* (1960), in which he hinted at the emergent quality of *guslar* performances that resulted

[16] For a discussion, see Claus and Korom (1991): 168-172.

[17] See, for example, the groundbreaking volume edited by the recently departed Dan Ben-Amos titled simply *Folklore Genres* (1976).

from performer/audience interaction and argued that no two performances are ever the same. Lord's emphasis on variation in performance made a new generation of folklorists aware that no *Ur*type can ever serve as the authentic original from which all future variants stem. Richard Bauman, one of the leaders of the contextual study of folklore, stated in his *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977: 38), that Lord's work was one of the first to conceptualize oral literature as emergent. But the folkloristic fusion really took place in the seventies, when a combined interest in text and context began taking shape.[18]

Credit is due, in part, to Dell Hymes (1927-2009), whose ethnography of speaking model emphasized culturally defined ways of speaking. Hymes sought to place language in a sociocultural context through ethnographic investigation. Hymes' method was appropriately labeled the "ethnography of speaking" because it sought to fill a void between linguistic grammars and descriptive ethnographies, something Malinowski was never able to do himself. The ethnography of speaking—influenced as it was by the Prague School's emphasis on synchronicity, functionalism, structuralism, contextualization and the aesthetic factor—contributed to modern folkloristics in at least three tangible ways. First, Hymes stressed performative language as an aesthetic mode of communication. Second, he viewed it as integrally related to a particular event. Third, he saw such verbal performances as culturally specific and cross-culturally variable.

Like the late Malinowski, Hymes was sensitive to the cross-cultural differences in language use, even while recognizing that some structural similarities do exist. In an early programmatic article, Hymes wrote that, "while it is important to know the ways in which the functions of speaking are the same in every group and for every personality, our concern here is with the ways in which they differ" (Hymes 1962: 29). Hymes also refined Malinowski's idea that a linguistic utterance can have multiple meanings depending on the context in which it is uttered. He writes:

For understanding and predicting behavior, contexts have a cognitive significance that can be summarized in this way. The use of a linguistic form identifies a range of meanings. A context can support a range of meanings. When a form is used in a context, it eliminates the meanings possible to that context other than those that form can signal; the context eliminates from consideration the meanings possible to the form other than those that context can support. The effective meaning depends upon the interaction of the two (Hymes 1962: 19).

But unlike the late Malinowski, Hymes felt that the speech economy of a group had to be delimited. He therefore proposed three ethnographic components of a speech economy: the speech event, the constituent factors of a speech event, and the functions of speech (1962: 24). By refining some of Malinowski's seminal ideas and reinserting ethnographic

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[18] It must be mentioned, however, that Lord's mentor Milman Parry (1902-1935) was very much influenced by the writings of the Slovenian scholar Matija Murko (1861-1952), whose work on southern Slavic epic poetry (e.g., Murko 1908 and especially Murko 1929) influenced Parry while he was studying for his doctoral degree at the Sorbonne. See Dalby (2006): 186-187 and Lord (1960): 11-12; 280, n. 1; 281, n. 2.

fieldwork into anthropological linguistics, Hymes and his colleagues paved the way for the folkloristic revolution of the 1970s.

The folkloristic fusion of the seventies, inspired by an interdisciplinary climate and the development of the ethnography of speaking in the sixties, encouraged synchronic, contextual and performance orientations in the study of "verbal art," as folklore was by that time being called, thanks to William Bascom (1955). Hence, it signaled the coming together of literary and anthropological folklorists. Key to the fusion was a common interest in the communicative processes involved in the production of folklore. Thus, folklore communicates something through being performed. But what it communicates can vary considerably, since the folklore fusionists acknowledged that a particular speech act could have multiple functions. Hymes had already indicated that any speech act can function to be, among other things, expressive (emotive), directive (by, which he means conative, pragmatic, rhetorical, persuasive), poetic, metalinguistic, referential and situational (Hymes 1962: 35). These multiple functions had to be understood in the emergent context of a verbal performance.

Robert Georges' influential article *Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events*, published in 1969, is indicative of the trend followed shortly thereafter in the seventies. Like Malinowski, he emphasized fieldwork to collect stories in context, emphasized storytelling as a complex communicative event and pointed out the emergent quality of such a communicative event.[19] An influential 1972 volume titled *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* is representative of the overall shift that occurred in the seventies. Richard Bauman, one of the editors, wrote in the introduction that "there is an emphasis upon performance as an organizing principle that comprehends within a single framework artistic act, expressive form, and esthetic response, and that does so in terms of locally defined, culture-specific categories and contexts" (Bauman 1972: vi).[20]

All the sentiments above echo many of Malinowski's concerns that I have already discussed. Indeed, Malinowski is often cited in the folkloristic literature of this period as an inspiration. This is attested by an opening comment authored by Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein, editors of another influential volume of the period. In *Folklore: Performance and Communication* (1975: 2-3), they write the following: "The use of the notion context, in this case, takes its point of departure from and does not duplicate Malinowski's concepts of context of culture and context of situation." The above two points, it can be said, have remained central to the development of folkloristic theory and methodology ever since in the United States.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me state a few things. Malinowski was one of the earliest proponents to advocate supplementing ethnolinguistic texts with contextual information. In this regard,

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[19] I cannot provide a complete genealogy of sources here but see Limón and Young (1986).

[20] See also the reflections of another one of the young Turks in Abrahams (1993).

Frank J. Korom
*Malinowski's Formative Contribution
to American Folklore Studies*

he had a great influence on performance-oriented folklorists. As Elizabeth Fine has stated, "Looking back from our vantage point today, some of [Malinowski's] theoretical statements about context seem almost indistinguishable from those of performance theorists (Fine 1984: 26). But there are differences as well. For the late Malinowski, as represented in his study of coral garden language, the meaning of a language in a society rested in the human actions it stimulated. So, the main function of language is not to express thought or to duplicate mental processes. Instead, language plays an active and pragmatic part in human behavior (Malinowski 1935: 7-8). Because he insisted that an utterance could only be understood in context, he was very concerned about translation, which led him to experiment with various techniques of transcription and translation. Because he felt that all kinetic gestures made while speaking were integral to the utterance, he recognized that such paralinguistic features needed to be incorporated into the transcription of a speech act itself. Hence, he sometimes included deictic gestures into his interlinear transcriptions as essential contextual data for properly translating the text. There are, of course, limits to getting enmeshed in such minute detail, since only the most patient reader could derive any pleasure out of reading such a laborious transcription.[21]

Malinowski opined that "if only" he had the appropriate technology, he could devise a more accurate system of translation. But as a pragmatist, he realized that this was not possible. However, his advocacy for a full physiological study of speech behavior once again anticipated later trends in proxemics and kinesiology, not to mention folkloristics.[22] Realizing his inability to provide a perfect translation, Malinowski demarcated five areas of context in the coral garden study: the sociological, the ritual, the structural, the dogmatic (i.e., beliefs) and the mode of recitation. For his plea to contextualize language use, folkloristics is indebted. But by focusing predominantly on the function of folklore in society as validating culture, Malinowski and his students following him focused most exclusively on those aspects of context that demonstrated a clear functional relationship between the text and the society from which it was excised. Therefore, functionalism never really developed an integral view of text and context that accounted for the phenomenological effect of any given verbal performance. In other words, Malinowski most often missed the immediacy of the performance event, which hindered his attempts to demonstrate how folklore was, in fact, an exemplary vehicle for enacting a society's collective representation of itself. But what Malinowski did do was draw attention to the context of situation, the importance of studying paralinguistic features of speech events and the notion of emergence. These three ideas, as well as his attempts to create more accurate methods of translation, have had the greatest impact on the way American folklorists work today. Folklorists, of course, have moved far beyond Malinowski's simplistic functionalism, but they are indebted to his attempt to bridge the chasm between text and context.

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[21] Tedlock (1983) would be one such example.

[22] For example, see Birdwhistell (1952, 1970). Raymond Birdwhistell (1918-1994) was the founder of anthropological kinesics and mentor of Erving Goffman (1922-1982) at the University of Toronto, both of whom would later collaborate with Hymes in Philadelphia to advocate for a more holistic and multidisciplinary approach to human communication as performance.

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POVZETEK

Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942) je bil osrednjega pomena pri razvoju teorije funkcionalizma v antropologiji. Dobro je znano, da je njegova pragmatična teorija, ki je nastala na podlagi intenzivnega terenskega dela na Trobriandskih otokih, v antropoloških krogih spodbudila mnogo razprav. Manj znan pa je vpliv, ki ga je Malinowski imel na razvoj sodobne folkloristike v ZDA. Ta kratek esej se osredotoča na njegovo pisanje o jeziku mita in magije, saj sta ta dva vidika njegovega dela najbolj nagovorila ameriške folkloriste v sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja. Takrat je prišlo do preoblikovanja akademskega študija folklore, ki se je odmaknil od ukvarjanja zgolj z besedili ter ubral bolj kontekstualen in etnografski pristop, ki primarno temelji na analizi ustnega nastopanja. Zagovarjam tezo, da je Malinowski neposredno vplival na tedanje tako imenovane mlade Turke folkloristike sedemdesetih let. Njegova filozofija jezika in poudarek na situacijskem pomenu sta še posebej vplivala na oblikovanje novega pristopa k proučevanju folklore, ki je postalo splošno znano kot »folkloristika«. Za razvoj folkloristike kot sodobne discipline predstavlja pogosto citirani izrek Malinowskega o »poslušanju domorodcev« ključno stično točko.

Esej je razdeljen na tri dele. Prvi del na kratko povzema tista dela Malinowskega, ki so bila najpomembnejša pri formiranju sodobne folkloristike. Drugi del obravnava razvoj folkloristike v sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja in se osredotoča na tiste ideje, na katere je imel Malinowski največji vpliv. Zadnji del na podlagi informacij, podanih v prvih dveh sklopih, kaže, da čeprav je večina strokovnjakov že presegla njegov funkcionalizem, številne temeljne ideje Malinowskega še vedno predstavljajo del kanona folkloristike. To, kar počnejo folkloristi, ko opravljajo etnografsko terensko delo, pa tudi ko analizirajo rezultate svojih raziskav po vrnitvi s terena, izhaja iz njegovega poudarka na razumevanju »stališča domačinov, njihovega odnosa do življenja in *njihove lastne* vizije sveta« (Malinowski 1922: 25).

Ritual: How Seemingly Senseless Acts Make Life Worth Living, by Dimitris Xygalatas

Michal Uhrin

Dimitris Xygalatas is an anthropologist and cognitive scientist interested in religion, ritual, music, and sports fanship among other topics. Xygalatas's book *Ritual: How Seemingly Senseless Acts Make Life Worth Living* (Profile Books, 2022; henceforth *Ritual*) results from years of rigorous ethnographic and experimental work. *Ritual* follows the perspective of the cognitive and evolutionary science of religion (hereafter referred to as CESR) and brings the reader up-to-date findings in the naturalistic study of religion and rituals. Xygalatas follows a neo-Darwinian and functionalistic approach to the study of religion, whose theoretical premises he describes in a way that is accessible even to the lay public throughout the book, but mainly in its second chapter.

Xygalatas deeply discusses the role of ritual, individual or collective, in evolution, history, culture, and society. He has devoted a large portion of his career to studying extreme rituals, that is, rituals involving high emotional and physical strain, which may or may not be directly related to religion. Enduring physical suffering in the form of walking on burning coals, piercing parts of the body with needles and hooks, or voluntarily exposing oneself to painful insect bites, etc., is typical for extreme rituals. In particular, the author has studied thoroughly the fire-walking rituals and the extreme rituals on the island of Mauritius.

In the book, Xygalatas asks the following questions among others: What are the origins of rituals? Do rituals help maintain and strengthen social cohesion? What is the role of extreme rituals in human societies? Are people performing extreme rituals more prosocial? What is the relationship between participation in extreme rituals and social status or attractiveness? To answer these questions briefly, Xygalatas argues in favour of rituals as mechanisms promoting social cohesion, in-group cooperation and prosocial behaviour, and as instruments to acquire control over activities whose outcome is more difficult to predict. Xygalatas argues for the rituals, religious or non-religious, including extreme rituals, to be an important part of our societies and an inherent part of our existence as human beings.

In 2012, Xygalatas published a major monograph entitled *The Burning Saints: Cognition and Culture in the Fire-Walking Rituals of the Anastenaria* (Routledge, 2012; henceforth *The Burning Saints*) dealing with fire-walking rituals in Greece, Spain, and Bulgaria from the CESR perspective. While *The Burning Saints* is aimed primarily at scholars engaged in the scientific study of religion, *Ritual* is, in my humble opinion, more accessible to a wider range of readers. First and foremost, of course, *Ritual* is of interest to scholars engaged in CESR. Secondly, it is an excellent gateway book for scholars studying religion from a different theoretical and methodological perspective than CESR. Thirdly, it is also one of the best and most accessible publications to the lay public concerning CESR because Xygalatas explains even complex theoretical concepts in clear and understandable language.

The author does not only discuss theoretical concepts and methodological approaches in the naturalistic study of rituals. The book is replete with ethnographic and historical examples of rituals that the author analyses thoroughly. In the final chapter, Xygalatas addresses the function of rituals in the 21st century, including the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. I humbly believe that this section could have been more extensive. Nonetheless, through nine chapters and 268 pages of text, Xygalatas draws the reader in with a clear and pervasive writing style.

It should be said that the author's aim is not to present a comprehensive overview of the anthropological, psychological, or sociological theories of ritual. Xygalatas's aim is to present current findings in CESR and thus to argue in favour of a naturalistic study of rituals and religion as an approach with a strong interdisciplinary focus and explanatory potential. In conclusion, *Ritual* is a brilliant demonstration of how one book can communicate current scientific knowledge to the general public and at the same time be a major contribution to the scientific and naturalistic study of ritual and religion.
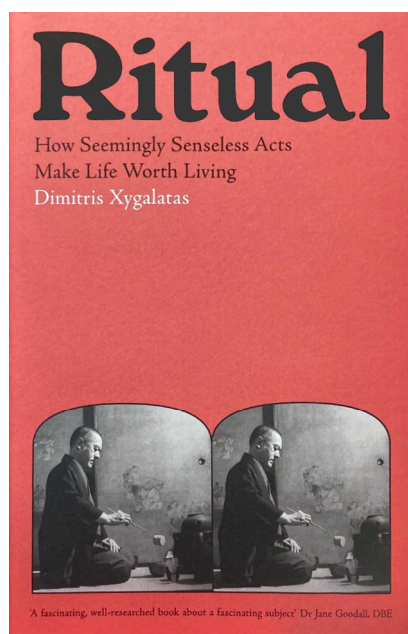
Srečanje, napolnjeno z raznolikostjo: poročilo o tretji bienalni slovenski folkloristični konferenci

Ambrož Kvartič

19. aprila 2024 se je v prostorih Oddelka za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo (FF UL) zbrala večina raziskovalk in raziskovalcev, ki s svojimi raziskovalnimi prizadevanji negujemo in plemenitimo folkloristiko v Sloveniji. Tretja izvedba bienalne slovenske folkloristične konference je postregla s pestrim naborom znanstvenih in strokovnih prispevkov, s katerimi so udeleženke in udeleženci predstavili svoje aktualne raziskave, dognanja in razmišljanja v tej vedi. Posebnih vsebinskih usmeritev konferenca ni imela, vseeno pa je njen programski odbor že v pozivu k oddaji prispevkov napovedal, da bo, če bo prijavljenih dovolj vsebinsko ustreznih referatov, del konference posvečen vprašanjem in izzivom, ki jih (tudi) za folkloristiko prinaša vzpon digitalnih informacijskih in komunikacijskih tehnologij.

Konferenčni dan se je začel z vabljenim predavanjem mag. Simone Moličnik, glasbene urednice na Radiu Slovenija, ki se je osredotočila na komplementarno naspro-tje med folkloristično vedo in njeno predstavljivostjo v javnosti ter na možnosti manjšanja te vrzeli. Program se je nadaljeval z metodološkimi prispevki, najprej o žanrskih razmislekih, konkretneje o raziskovanju kratkih folklornih žanrov (Rok Mrvič, ISN ZRC SAZU), in nato o konkretnih projektih digitalizacije in urejanja zbirk pripovednega gradiva oziroma folklornih obrazcev (dr. Saša Babič in dr. Barbara Ivančič Kutin, ISN ZRC SAZU). Prispevku o prednostih in slabostih uvajanja digitalnih raziskovalnih pristopov v folkloristiko (Jasmina Rejec, IRRIS) sta do odmora za kosilo sledila še prispevka o ljubiteljskem snemanju kot metodološkem orodju (dr. Helena Konda) in o povezavi med folkloristiko ter muzejskimi interpretacijami in prezentacijami religije (dr. Anja Mlakar, FT UM, IRRIS).

Začetek popoldanskega dela konference so oblikovali trije prispevki, združeni v vsebinski sklop 'Mozaiki časa in prostora', ki so udeležencem predstavili teme zunaj slo-

venskega nacionalnega prostora oziroma z
več desetletij trajajočim historiatom. Prvi je
predstavil pripovedi o mrtvih, ki se navezujejo na genocid v Srebrenici (prof. dr. Mirjam Mencej, OEiKA FF), drugi večplastno
razmerje med ljudmi, neljudmi in krajino na
Islandiji (dr. Ana Svetel, OEiKA FF), tretji pa
specifičnosti in političnost (post)socialistične folkloristike (dr. Marjeta Pisk, GNI ZRC
SAZU). Konferenco so v zadnjem sklopu,
naslovljenem 'Razkošje motivov', zaokrožili: prispevek, ki je prevpraševal lik Kralja
Matjaža v slovenskem kulturnem prostoru
(dr. Marija Klobčar, GNI ZRC SAZU), sistematična predstavitev raznorodnih apokaliptičnih teorij zarote v digitalnih okoljih
(Kristina Radomirović Maček) in razkritje
ustvarjalnega procesa muzikala *Povodni mož*
(dr. Ambrož Kvartič, OEiKA FF).

Tretja bienalna slovenska folkloristična konferenca niti po številu udeležencev niti po številu prispevkov ni bila velika,
vendar pa so se na njej prav zato še močneje
iskrile ideje, mešala spoznanja in utrdile vezi.
Skozi posamezne predstavitve je namreč v
ospredje prišlo predvsem veliko navdušenje,
ki ga slovenske raziskovalke in raziskovalci
pripovedne in pesemske folklore vsak pri
sebi čutimo ob svojem delu. In že zaradi tega
je bila konferenca uspešna.

A Report on the Round Table "Are You Here All Alone?: The Experiences, Challenges, and Successes of Female Researchers in Fieldwork"

Simona Kuntarič Zupanc, Petra Hamer and Tina Ivnik

The round table titled *"A ti pa kar sama tukaj?: Izkušnje, izzivi in uspehi raziskovalk na terenskem delu"* ("Are You Here All Alone?: The Experiences, Challenges, and Successes of Female Researchers in Fieldwork") took place on 21 May 2024 at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and so concluded a series of events part of the *Dnevi enakosti spolov FF 2024* (Days of Gender Equality FF 2024). The organisers of the round table and researchers of the ERC project DEAGENCY, Simona K. Zupanc, Tina Ivnik, and Petra Hamer, encouraged the participants to reflect on two key questions: how gender influences fieldwork and which safety strategies participants use and recommend in fieldwork.

The discussion confirmed that gender plays a significant role in fieldwork research regardless of the research environment. Participants Dagmar Nared (FF), Dr Marija Mojca Terčelj (FHŠ), Dr Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc (ZRC SAZU), Nastja Slavec (ZRC SAZU), and Dr Katja Žvan Elliott (MZZ) shared their experiences and strategies, providing insights into various ways female researchers navigate fieldwork often marked by patriarchal structures. Their fieldwork experiences in Turkey, South America, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Basque Country, and Morocco demonstrated that the impact of gender on fieldwork also varies depending on specific circumstances and cultural, religious, and political contexts.

Despite sharing diverse experiences, it became clear during the event that there

is insufficient discussion about preventive strategies to protect female researchers in the field. For example, this critical shortfall is even evident in the introductory methodology lectures at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology. The researchers highlighted the need for clear and structured guidelines that could help female researchers better understand and prepare for the potential dangers and challenges of fieldwork.

The concluding initiative of the round table calls for a different approach and for the challenges that female anthropologists face to be seriously addressed. Creating a space for sharing experiences and strategies contributes to building a community that can provide support and safety for female researchers. This is crucial for the further development of fieldwork and ensuring equal conditions for all researchers regardless of gender.

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