

Volumographic reduction is not phenomenological reduction.

Theory and drawings on the conditions for describing a human being

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Abstract

This article reflects on the characteristics of phenomenological reduction in its Husserlian foundation, in comparison with the volumographic reduction advocated by the authors, with the aim of describing and analysing human beings, each in their uniqueness. The authors attempt to show that volumographic reduction has characteristics that are opposed to phenomenological reduction and its use in phenomenological anthropology: it saves each singular entity, does not privilege acts of consciousness, does not value contexts, and does not add other beings. In this configuration of ideas, the authors conclude that there is a kind of affinity between the history of anthropology, which emphasises relations and contexts, and what phenomenological discourse allows in a certain way. The article combines text and drawings that the authors refer to as "drawings of theory": they clarify, motivate, and develop the proposed reading.

Keywords

Epoché, volume of being, phenomenological anthropology, Husserl, phenomenology, individuality, relation, context, drawings

When the social sciences look at several individuals interacting and in intersubjectivity, when they place an individual in context, they immediately include these individuals and this context in their research objective, while focusing on what, in the human being, is associated with and attached to context. Each singular human entity, which we have called volume of being, is then lost, fragmented and diluted. Portraits, which are relatively numerous in anthropology, are misleading. They make us believe that anthropology has as its topic the human being, and even a human being. But very quickly the reader understands what is going on: the portrait focuses on a part of the human being, the part associated with a specific "as", with an equally specific context, in order to understand that context and/or show how it sheds light on the figure being portrayed by the anthropologist. This is one of the foundations of social anthropology associated with the work of the ethnographer.

To describe is not to write, is not to compose stories. The Latin word *de-scribere* means the act of copying, transcribing, delimiting, determining. The prefix *de-* indicates detachment, distance, separation. It means that, in order to describe, we first need something or someone to look at. What we call volumography and volumology thus consists of extracting and then looking at a being in itself, in its entirety¹. In the volumographic exercise, the human unit, which is usually relegated to the contextual "background", becomes the central "figure", while situations, cultures, environments, relations, actions, activities and experiences become secondary or parts of a volume. A human being, as a unit, one at a time, is the focus of observation, whose modes of structuring all components, whether associated with the context or not, must be understood. It is therefore not a question of taking a step back from "the intentional threads which attach us to the world", as Merleau-Ponty writes, in order to bring them "to our notice" (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. XV).

We would like to understand the principle of methodological detachment that ensures such closure around the human entity as a volumographic reduction. Husserl's phenomenological reduction, which may also seem like a form of detachment, is important to refer to in order to clarify the type of detachment or reduction sought here. Reflection on phenomenological reduction is all the more necessary given that the operation of epoché is particularly debated in anthropology in essential texts (Jackson 1996; Duranti 2010; Desjarlais and Throop, 2011; Throop, 2018; Throop and Zahavi, 2020).

¹ The ideal method is continuous filming, as continuous as possible and for as long as possible, with the camera focused on one human being at a time, followed by frame-by-frame analysis. But that is another debate. See Beaugrand and Piette (2025).

Based on his famous approach of bracketing the natural thesis of the world, Husserl specifies that such an epoché "completely shuts me off from any judgement about spatiotemporal factual being" (Husserl, 1983, p. 61). "Thus I exclude all sciences, he writes, relating to this natural world no matter how firmly they stand there for me [...]. I make absolutely no use of the things posited in them. Nor do I make my own a single one of the propositions belonging to those sciences, even though it be perfectly evident" (p. 61). In the volumographic objective, there is no "suspension" of this kind. On the contrary, it is the reality of each human entity presented as a singular volume that is asserted². We would like to explain the epistemological conditions of such an approach. We will clarify it in five steps, associating it with a set of drawings – created by Catherine Beaugrand - that we call "drawings of theory". They clarify, motivate, and develop our reading (see also Piette, 2023).

1-Saving individual reality

Husserl's argument is more radical than it appears with this suspension of judgement, since it effectively prevents any focus on the "here and now" of an individual. It is the empirical intuition of the individual that he rejects, refusing to accept that knowledge should remain focused on "this here", i.e. "what is unique to the individual at a given place and time" (Perreau, 2008, p. 80). This leads Laurent Perreau to say that phenomenology "systematically invalidates the individual as an individual in order to allow the essence to be exalted" (p. 84). "It is even by turning away from the individual, writes Laurent Perreau, that it formulates its project" (p. 77). Husserl's so-called eidetic reduction is then, in the words of Natalie Depraz, to free oneself from the "particular sensible given", "from the unilateral reign of the effective" or even "from the arbitrariness of the contingent", from "pure factitious singularity", "from its sole empiricising effectiveness" (Depraz, 2006, pp. 109-110). It is in this configuration of ideas that Husserl "purifies" his examples, stripping them of various contingencies that bring about vagueness or ambiguity (Vermersch, 1999).

The volume of being is not a "critique of the intuition of the individual" as fact, reality or existence. It is the reinforcement of this intuition, demanding the insistent observation of volumic reality in all its singularity. It is details, nuances, all the variations from moment to moment, that an anthropologist focused on the empirical entirety of the volume of being seeks. Even if it is possible to consider that, from comparison to comparison, the goal is to

² For a bold attempt, combining text and drawings, to apply the volumographic approach, see Asher Brum (2023). For a first attempt at theorising the volume of being, see Piette (2019).

discover general properties, the volumographer cannot in any way disregard the empirical details that are decisive elements in the functioning of a particular volumic entity. They are not illustrations but decisive elements. The volume of being is always already associated not only with an existing entity, this one and no other, but also with a concrete form, whose singularity of expressions, and no others, is decisive in its functioning as an entity (see drawings 1abcd).

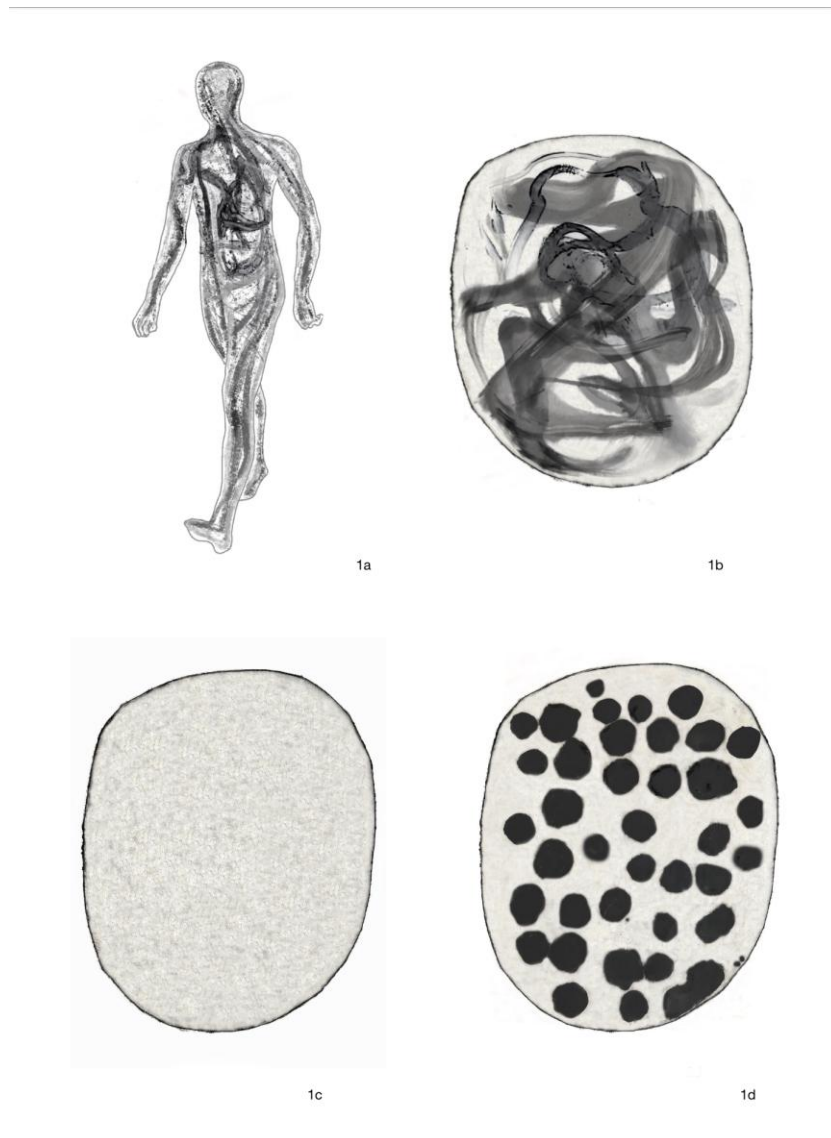


Fig.1a: We imagine the volume of being inside the human organism, resembling different biological systems (digestive, nervous, circulatory), as a kind of existential anatomy.

Fig. 1b: We will represent him or her two-dimensionally as a closed, slightly irregular, potatooid shape.

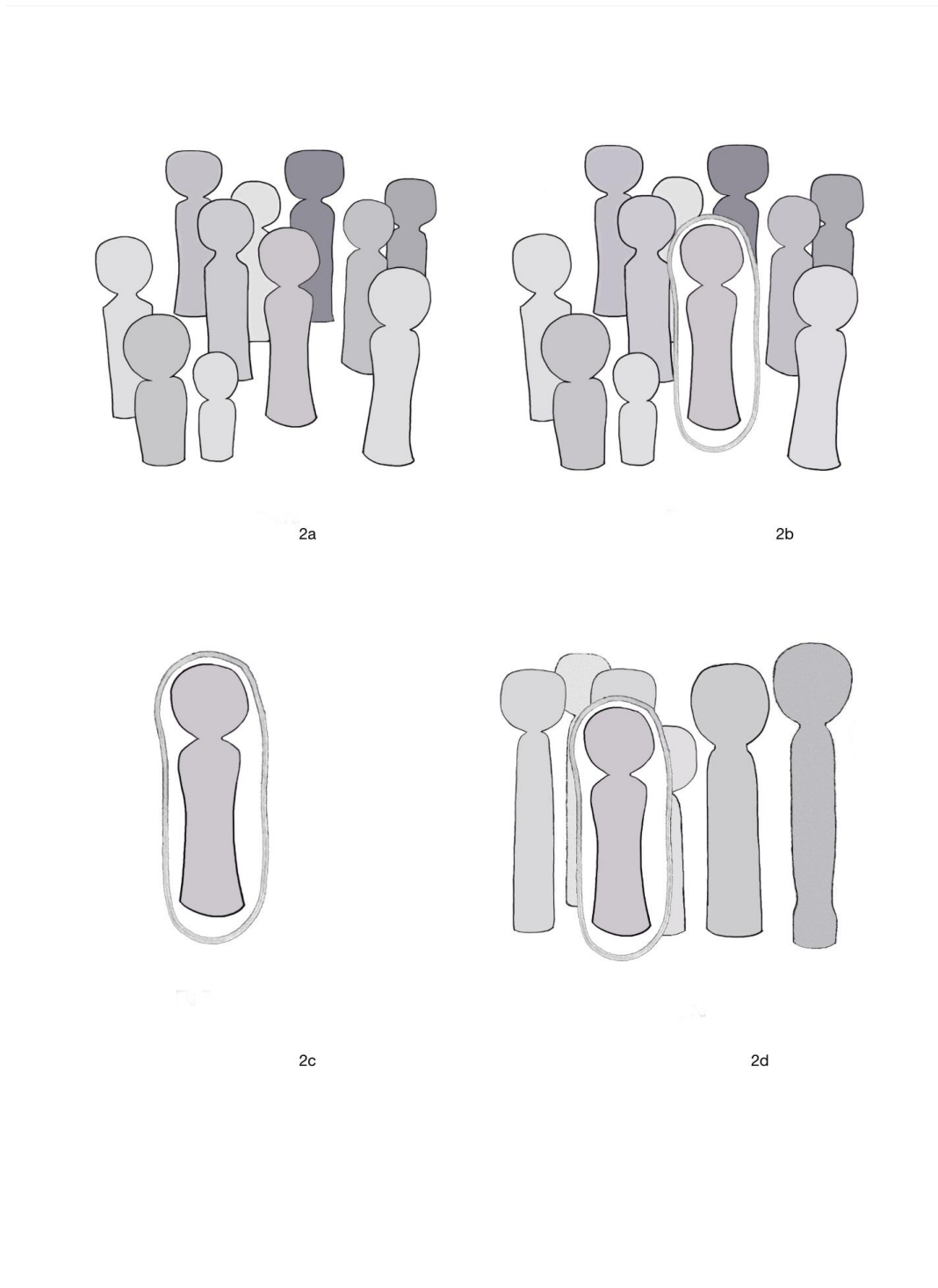
Fig. 1c: The volume of being is represented with an outline and interior. Metaphorically, this would be the colour we discover when we enter a volume of being. It is a way of signifying the inner colour that is specific to him or her.

Fig. 1d: There is no volume of being without components that we call "voluments" (elements of a volume of being). They are represented by patches of different sizes to reflect their multiple variations according to the content involved. These voluments are the ones that most often interest the human and social sciences separately: actions, gestures, emotions, language, moods, social or cultural markers, thoughts, memories, cognitive, socio-cognitive or psychological expressions, or even specific stylistic traits, such as mimics or character tendencies.

2- Suspending relations and what surrounds a human entity

Furthermore, it is not so certain that the natural attitude and classical mode of scientific knowledge consist solely in placing a real individual in a specific spatio-temporal position, as Husserl seemed to suggest. The intuition of the individual is not so obvious, quite the contrary. Because most often it takes concrete form by associating this individual with others and fragmenting him into parts. The natural attitude is not where one might think it is. Locke is particularly enlightening: "The understanding, in the consideration of anything, he writes, is not confined to that precise object: it can carry an idea as it were beyond itself, or at least look beyond it, to see how it stands in conformity to any other" (p. 302). This is even what we do most often and what is a basic principle claimed by anthropology. Locke suggestively clarifies: "When the mind so considers one thing, that it does as it were bring it to, and set it by another, and carries its view from one to the other—this is, as the words import, relation and respect; and the denominations given to positive things, intimating that respect, and serving as marks to lead the thoughts beyond the subject itself" (Locke, 1999, p. 302). Considering Caius as "a positive being" implies thinking "what really exists in Caius". Locke indicates that designating him as a husband and no longer as a "man" implies taking him beyond himself, towards his wife, marriage, marital practices in a given society, the relationship between men and women, etc., as if, Locke explains, the relationship allowed for greater clarity and distinction in the mind than substances (pp. 305-306). Of course, it is important to include "husband" in Caius, but without taking the analysis beyond him, while looking at what this quality does to him, along with his other characteristics. Does this not reintroduce relations in another way, one might object? Yes, but without analysing a relation *between two individuals* - rather analysing the structuration of voluments *in one volume of being* - and without getting lost him or her in the context.

What volumography seeks to preserve is an entity, without associating him or her with others in its various relations. It therefore consists of freeing oneself from a relational predisposition to look at an individual with others, in relation to them, in a situation. Volumography is an exclusive "focus" on a volume of being, already facing the observer, after putting aside what surrounds him or her. These other entities are blurred, as much as possible, so that they are not included in descriptions and analyses and thus do not detract from the chosen entity . In doing so, volumography also departs from the natural attitude presented by Locke, which is not this intuition of the individual (see drawings 2abcd).



There is a starting point (**fig. 2a**). The closure isolates one being, without integrating the other beings (**fig. 2b**). It is this enclosed being that we extract (**fig. 2c**), that we find in another situation and from which we want to analyse the voluments and their combinations (**fig. 2d**).

3- Do not privilege consciousness

There is another point in the phenomenological project and its Husserlian version. Starting from the epoché, which consists in suspending the thesis of the natural attitude, the irreducible

sphere of a transcendental ego is revealed as constituting the meaning of the world through its intentional acts. Thus, "phenomenology establishes consciousness as the absolute region in relation to which other regions are constituted" and thus the subject becomes "the founding instance of every object in the world" (Perreau, 2008, p. 86). From these reductions and bracketing of the individual or the empirical world, the acts and experiences of consciousness escape. They are not affected by the "methodical exclusion of any position of existence" (p. 85). Consciousness of, the correlation between the subject and the world, consciousness as the pole of constitution and unification of the objects of the world, are what remain of Husserl's reduction. However, in the volumographic proposition, it is the entity itself, as separate, that is primary, and not any of its voluments, such as consciousness. The aim is to bring out an existential entirety, without reducing it to one part that would be more constitutive than another, and to follow, according to the moment, the variable importance of these voluments³. Volumic entirety cannot but clash with the importance given in phenomenology to subjective life. Focusing on particular voluments such as modes of consciousness, feelings, emotions – what is often called lived experience – is another way of relegating the entity in question to the background. A volume of being is more than that. Thus, Husserl's suspensive approach makes it clear, by contrast, that it is precisely this entity that the volumographic operation seeks to observe and describe, without fragmenting it, without accompanying it with other entities, without questioning its reality and its qualification.

Having already undergone eidetic reduction, the entity receives its coup de grâce, since this phenomenological operation reveals the relativity of beings and things in the world in relation to subjectivity and the activities of intentional consciousness. Husserl writes that "no thing has its individuality in itself" (Husserl, 1980, p. 313): "it is ultimately the act of consciousness that establishes the position of spatio-temporal existence" (Perreau, 2008, p. 87). In this reading, there would be no existence in itself, but rather "an appearance relative to an 'individual subjectivity'" (Perreau, 2008, p. 88). While phenomenological epoché thus makes the world disappear as objective and independent, the volumographic operation aims to extract an entity considered to exist independently of the observer. In this quest for objectivity, volumography does not embrace the valorisation of subjectivity and experience of the researcher in their research topic, as this experience can become the theme of the research, replacing the entity. This is what many anthropologists with an affinity for phenomenology

³ See, for example, the fourth Cartesian meditation, which focuses heavily on consciousness, perception, memory and attention (Husserl, 1982).

will retain, emphasising the relational plays of the researcher in their ethnographic field (see, for example, Desjarlais and Throop, 2011; Willen and Seeman, 2012, among others).

4- The difference with phenomenological anthropology

Unlike Husserlian reduction, volumographic reduction is necessarily different from the proposals of anthropologists who draw on phenomenology. Based on his dialogue with phenomenology, Jason Throop mentions an ethnographic epoché, which he presents as "a method of potentiating possibilities for thinking that is grounded in a practical, dynamic, and open attunement to worldly situations that ethnographers find themselves living through" (Throop, 2018, pp. 206-207). He adds that it is "confrontations with various forms and intensities of difference (intersubjective, situational, eventful, and worldly)" that "may initiate the ethnographic epoché" (p.201). Here we find the essence of the ethnographic approach and the different forms of decentring that it has always valued. Such an epoché does not seek to bring out a human entity in relation to other entities and outside its contextual framework. Ethnographic suspension focuses specifically on the prejudices that the researcher may have, allowing everything that happens to come to the fore, particularly lived experiences. Such suspension is explicitly present in Michael Jackson, who translates Husserl's epoché as "a practical relativism: the suspension of inquiry into the divine or objective truth of particular customs, beliefs, or worldviews in order to explore them as modalities or moments of experience, to trace their implications and uses—the way in which they appear to consciousness" (Jackson, 1996, p.10). "Indeed, continues Hrvoje Cargonja, none better than the anthropologist knows what it really means to exercise bracketing in practice. Faced with the enveloping otherness of [a] different culture, every anthropologist very soon realises how important it is to suspend personal prejudices if one is to advance in understanding how people make sense out of their lives" (Cargonja, 2013, p. 34).

In reality ethnographic epoché requires an almost inevitable recognition of contexts, those very contexts that allow us to "put things into perspective", that explain or shed light on the experiences that are of particular interest to phenomenological anthropology. It is as if the suspension of cultural prejudices automatically introduces into anthropology a valorisation of each particular situation or context. This means bringing these situated experiences to the fore and leaving entities in the background. This is quite the opposite of what the volumographic approach proposes in separating the figure from the contextual background. With

phenomenology, we cannot escape the "interdit anthropologique" (Monod 2009; Blumemberg, 2011): if not through eidetic reduction, then through the reintroduction of the world and context, as well as through a focus on humans fragmented in their experiences and interiority. It is therefore not surprising that Sarah Willen and Don Seeman, summarising phenomenological anthropology on the basis of a wide variety of ethnographic works, emphasise the link with socio-political situations: "The turn to experience in contemporary anthropology has not, for the most part, involved a collapse of concern for the whole gamut of social and cultural features of human life. Rather, it has more typically provided a conceptual bridge between individual lifeworlds and the much broader political-economic trends and cultural-symbolic systems that constrain and inform them." (Willen and Seeman, 2012, p. 6). Jason Throop's research on experiences of suffering in the Yap Islands is highly symptomatic of this perspective. It does indeed seek to understand the experience of suffering and vulnerability as inherent in the human condition, with the caution mentioned (in fact, commonly claimed) of not flattening individual experiences too much, of perceiving differences between them. But the methods are revealing - dominance of interviews and life stories, rather brief presentation of individuals and personal experiences based on discourse, observation of interactions, archival documents on Yap cultural values and local medical policy - as is the objective: "situating subjective experiences of pain in light of local systems of knowledge, morality, and practice, I investigate the ways pain can be transformed into locally valued forms of moral experience within the context of particular individuals' culturally constituted lifeworlds" (Throop, 2010, p.2); or also: "a significant portion of the book is devoted to discussing the social, historical, and moral contexts that provide the background against which Yapese individuals' understandings of pain are articulated" (p.2). One of the leitmotifs is precisely the articulation of experience *with the rest*, i.e. political contexts and cultural processes. Once again, being is diminished and absorbed into and with the rest. This has thus become one of the specific arguments of "critical phenomenology": "to go beyond phenomenological description to understand why things are this way: to inquire, for instance, into what we mean by feeling, how it comes about, what it implies, and what broader cultural and political forces are involved" (Desjarlais, 2011, p. 25; see in this direction Mattingly, 2019). Above all, the object of study is not an individual entity.

Thus, phenomenological anthropology, which feared too strong a focus on subjectivity (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011)⁴, never abandons the central place of 'others', giving them major theoretical importance. We are far from point 2. There is nothing surprising about this, quite the contrary, since phenomenological suspension itself, in its Husserlian starting point, ends with the reintroduction of 'others' and intersubjective relations. This 'other', rediscovered in the Husserlian system, is the one who, as Jean-Michel Salanskis comments, "gives himself to me primitively as a body, as a carnal entity in the world" (Salanskis, 1998, p. 67), an 'other' with whom everyone discovers similarities, "a body animated by the conscious life of a self" (p. 67). Husserl uses the term *Einführung* to indicate how each of us receives the manifestation of others. He also adds an operation of intersubjectivity, through which it is possible to conceive of "the intentional collaboration of various monads in the constitution of a world that is the same for all" (p. 69), and from there, "the procedures of common validation of experiences as each knows them". What happened? Starting with consciousness, its intentionalities and flows, Husserl first introduced or reintroduced the unity of subjective life and the properties that remain permanent, the various sedimentations, tendencies, determinations, style and character. To this end, he proposed the notions of the concrete self, the monad and the person - in the fourth Cartesian meditation - not without grafting onto them a number of social and ethical issues. Then, questioning the risk of solipsism, of remaining "solus ipse" (Husserl, 1982, p. 89), he sought to make explicit the meaning of the being of others (p. 90). Thus, in the fifth meditation, Husserl reintegrated others into the "sphere of one's own belonging" and proposed his analysis of intersubjective life and the "intermonadic community" (p. 128). The 'red carpet' is rolled out for anthropologists. While the latter, interested in Husserl, did not really dwell on the concrete self and the monad, they did find something to justify their interest in intersubjectivity and the world of rules and norms.

This is what Alessandro Duranti, as an anthropologist, has understood. By adding Schutz's 'sociological' reading, he discovers in Husserlian analysis the possibility of a foundation for all the fields and all the research of anthropology: "When properly understood, intersubjectivity can constitute an overall theoretical frame for thinking about the ways in which humans interpret, organise, and reproduce particular forms of social life and social cognition" (Duranti, 2010, p. 17). He adds: "Taking inspiration from this perspective, I suggest that intersubjectivity could be the common ground on which to found a truly interdisciplinary study of human sociality", with the challenge of "distinguishing among

⁴ Douglas Hollan points out the psychological deficit in the work of anthropologists inspired by phenomenology (Hollan, 2014).

different ways or degrees of sociality" (p. 17). Volumographic reduction does not involve adding elements once it has been carried out, unlike the various stages of the phenomenological operation. The human entity is both a starting point and an end point, because it seeks to retain the power of its delimitation of being, from the beginning to the end of the research.

We must therefore accept that phenomenological anthropology did not find it useful to discuss the Husserlian principle which, at a certain point in its thinking, abstracts itself from particular existences, and retained the operation of suspending prejudices applied to the diversity of situations and contexts. These are therefore all the more essential to the understanding of what the anthropologist sees, in keeping with the history of anthropology. Contextual insight replaces Husserl's search for essences. In doing so, anthropology has found affinities with phenomenology that allow it to remain within its relational and contextual matrix - as evidenced by phenomenology-inspired anthropological literature seeking to analyse lived experiences that are immediately placed in relation to each other, in intersubjectivity, with and within specific social, cultural and political contexts⁵. With all this in mind, we do not perceive in anthropology's recourse to phenomenology any possibility of conceptual destabilisation or disruption of the "representational or analytic strategies of the anthropologist", as Cheryl Mattingly (2019, p. 427) would like. On the contrary, anthropology takes from phenomenology what interests it.

Thus, according to the phenomenological inspiration in its Husserlian foundations, we would have five empirical possibilities: paying no attention to particular existences, valuing contexts, rediscovering, with the others reintroduced, intersubjectivity and relationships, studying consciousness (and its modes) as a privileged fragment, thus turning away from being itself - or also as constitutive, which obliges and justifies including the researcher in his ethnographic work. There is thus in the phenomenological foundation a kind of unfavourable disposition to the observation and description of singular entities. Conversely, what the volumographic operation seeks can be summed up as follows: neither essence, nor reduction to consciousness (or to lived experience), nor reintroduction of others and the social world, nor valorisation of contexts, nor relational involvement of the researcher, but the whole entity in its empirical

⁵ See, for example, Desjarlais and Throop (2011) and Ram and Houston (2015), with the various texts collected. More recently: Schnegg (2019). For other critical elements of phenomenological anthropology, see Kneubühler (2023) or Kneubühler and Piette (2019).

details, separated from what surrounds it. This volumographic reduction could also be called "existential reduction", centred on the existent, one at a time (see drawings 3abcde).

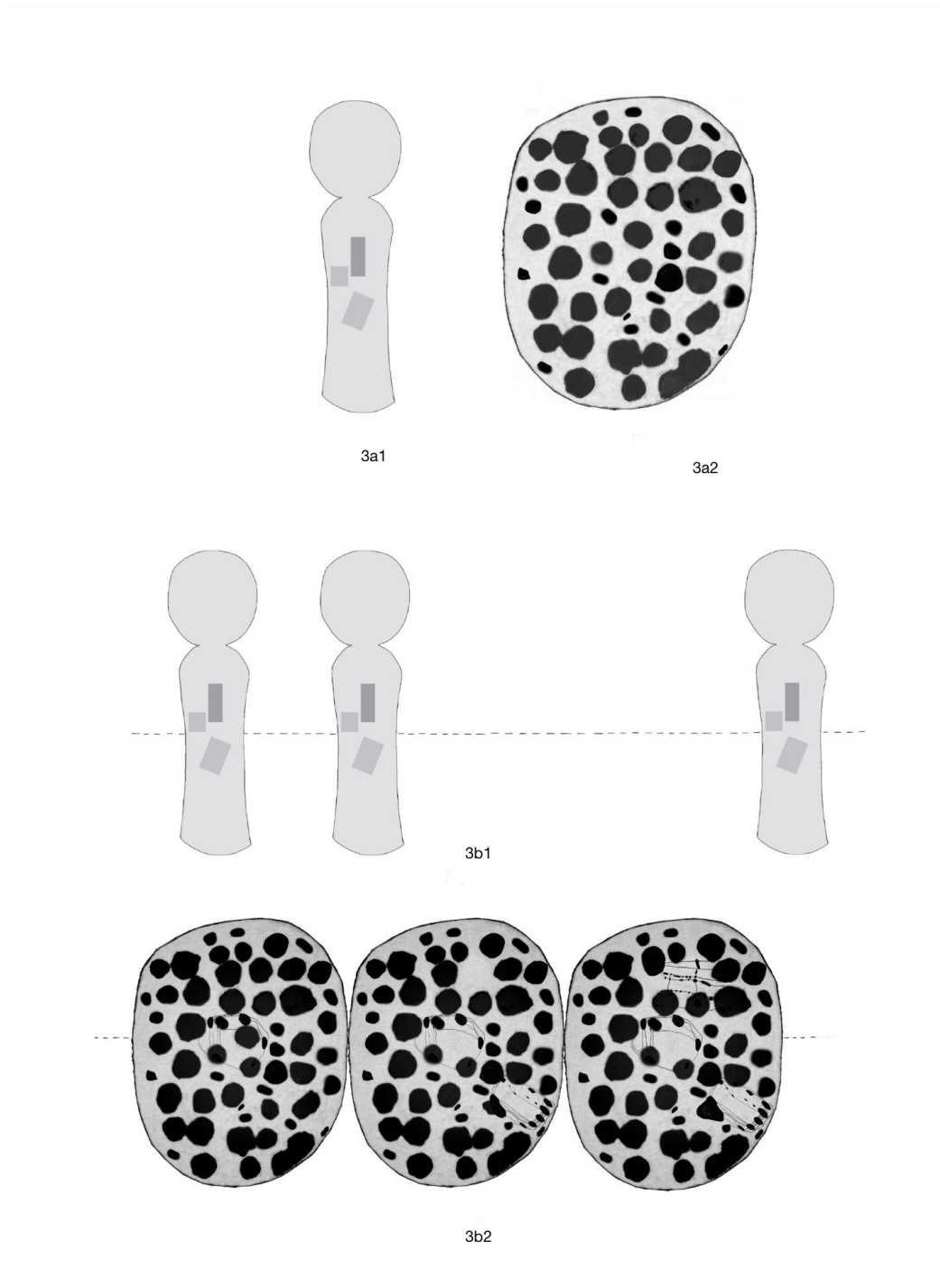


Fig. 3a: Selective focalisation. This consists of choosing a few privileged voluments, represented by small geometric figures in the entity (**fig. 3a1**) and not the entire volume of being with as many of their voluments as possible (**fig. 3a2**).

Fig. 3b: Selective focalisation bis. This consists of looking at a few voluments in specific situations and separated moments (**fig. 3b1**) and not the whole in the strict continuity of moments, revealing different combinations of voluments (**fig. 3b2**).

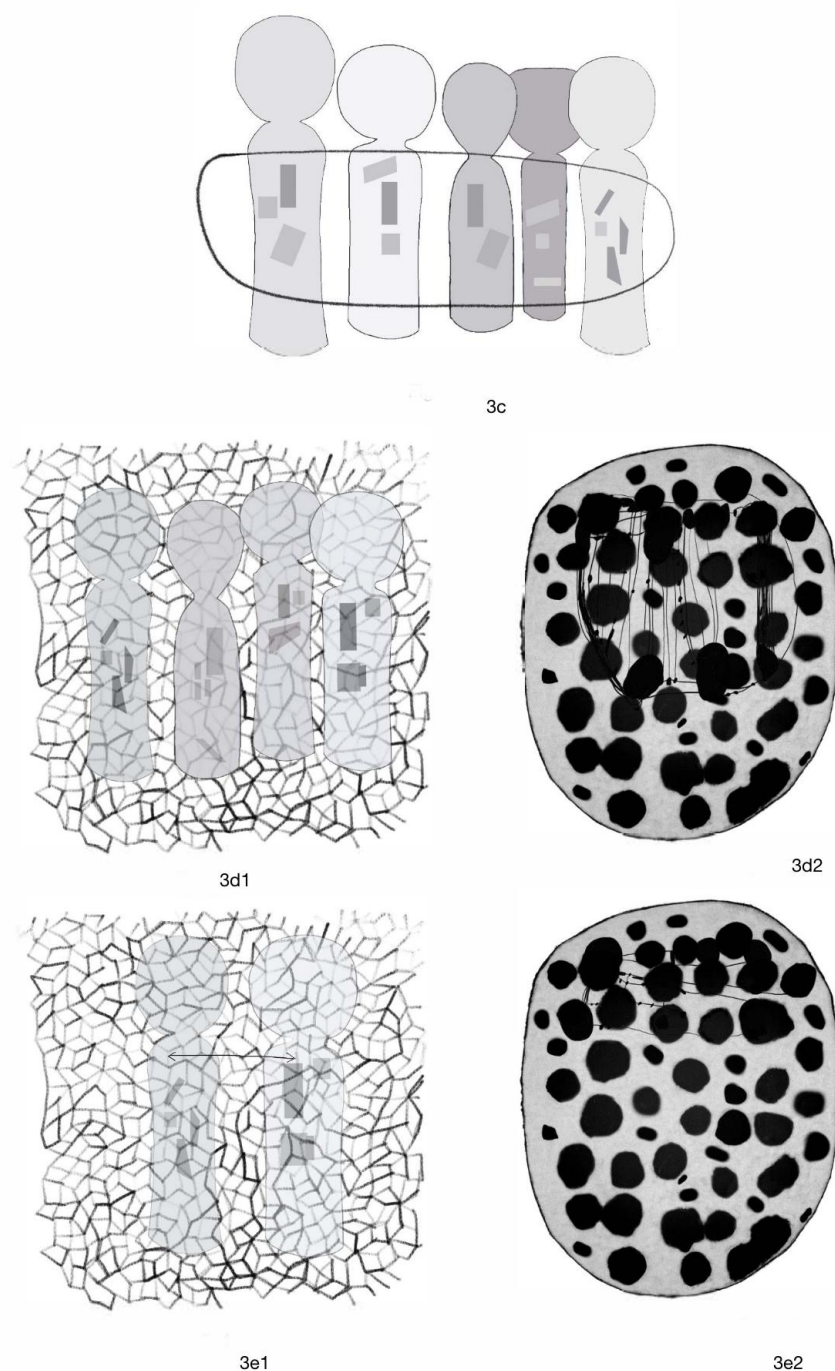


Fig. 3c: Putting together. This consists of homogenising individuals on the basis of voluments that are identical to them (rather than looking at a single being).

Fig. 3d: Contextualisation. Beings are thought of in a context represented by a background (designating an era, a place, a culture, etc.) into which they are blended. Context is taking on greater importance than humans (**fig. 3d1**), while volumographic reduction has isolated a volume from their surroundings, without excluding the possibility of identifying contextual traces in the other voluments (**fig. 3d2**).

Fig. 3e: Dilution. Placed in a context and in a relationship of intersubjectivity translated by the two-way arrow, the individuals are increasingly diluted (**fig. 3e1**), while volumographic reduction invites us to study the intracombinations of the voluments, those concerning intersubjectivity and the others (**fig. 3e2**).

5. Do not consider the human entity as a descriptive impossibility

There is another temptation in the phenomenological and also existentialist tradition that volumographic reduction wants to avoid at all costs: the presentation of the entity as an excess or an inaccessible indeterminacy, whereas the volume of being before the observer can be considered as a totality to be covered as exhaustively as possible. Existential anthropology cannot constantly repeat that human reality is complex and infinite or that total knowledge is impossible. Sartre proclaims the overflow, or at least the indeterminacy, of existence, which is not necessarily compatible with the dissection of the volume of being and his meticulous analysis. Faced with the complexity of its dimensions, Michael Jackson, for his part, does not wish to capture the individual, pointing to the limits of language and words in expressing the complexity of experience (Jackson, 2013, p. 7). He thus favours a way of thinking about oscillations that shift beings from one pole to another, allowing certain volumes of the individual to wander, emerge according to situations and create social impacts. Is it possible to construct a science of existence based on the representation of the Other as an absolute exterior, "visited by the Infinite", as Nigel Rapport insists in direct reference to Levinas (Rapport, 2019, p. 73)? It seems risky to us that, when faced with the other it seeks to describe, as if to compensate for the limitations of "science", anthropology abandons its exercise to aesthetic forms, textual or otherwise: is this not once again masking the reality of the human being?

In this vein of ideas about descriptive impossibility, Merleau-Ponty is another possible connection. Confronted with the problems of analysing the relation between the body and the mind, at odds with the sciences that seek to fix and with the valorisation of a founding consciousness, Merleau-Ponty presents the human being as a problem that forces the human sciences to be constantly concerned, attentive and self-critical. "So there cannot in all good conscience, he writes, be any question of solving the human problem; there can only be a question of describing man as problematic" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 202). For, according to Merleau-Ponty's typical language, the individual is not conceived as a "real unity", but is always "indivisibly demolished and remade by the course of time" (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 255) and the body "is not where it is, nor what it is" (p. 229), and even when it allows existence to evade the world, "the body never quite falls back on itself" (p. 191). The human being in question is in fact "suspended and put on hold in favour of a problematising type of questions", according to the illuminating remarks made by Étienne Bimbenet on the topic (Bimbenet, 2001, p. 252). This becomes "an idea of an inquiry without discovery, a hunt

without a kill" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 202), which naturally makes it possible to question, for example, the body, perception or intersubjectivity, but about a being who does not cease to escape, slide away and slip away. The human being is not regarded as an observable given, as we suggest, but as an event or an advent: "Mind and man never are, they show through in the movement by which the body becomes gesture, language an oeuvre, and coexistence truth" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 240). However, according to the volumographic approach presented here, what anthropologists need is a clearly present given and "handholds" to capture it, while keeping this debate in mind. Is not the epistemological debate overplayed with this emphasis on the "problematic" dimension of human beings? One of the aims of volume of being with his voluments is to provide this lever and to relieve the human entity of the various metaphysical and epistemological burdens that would make him an impossible "object". It seems important to us that, in redefining its field, anthropology should not bear the weight of all these difficulties.

In short, on the one hand, humans would each be too unique, too concrete or problematic in the epistemological debates of the phenomenological tradition. On the other hand, the social sciences do not hesitate to recover the valorisation of relational expressions prized by phenomenology. The human being as an empirical entity loses out on both sides.

Coda

Phenomenological anthropology questions, and it is also possible to question it. But is not it the history of anthropology itself that should be radically questioned, given that it cannot escape context and relations? Morten Pedersen has outlined, based on a comparative analysis of phenomenological anthropology and the ontological turn, an exercise in doubt that takes us down this path, even if he stops at the point where he seems to say that anthropology is made up of ethnographic materials and relationships, not human entities. Pedersen nevertheless wants to indicate that the ontological turn goes further than phenomenological doubt. To this end, he recalls the words of Henare, Holbraad and Wastell (2007, pp. 2-3, cited in Pedersen, 2020): "Instead of advancing yet more complex and ostensibly sophisticated theoretical models ... [we propose] ... a new methodology. With purposeful naivety, the aim of this method is to take 'things' encountered in the field as they present themselves, rather than immediately assuming that they signify, represent, or stand for something else." According to Pedersen, it is therefore a question of "taking the things that people in the field say, do, or use

so seriously that they trump all metaphysical claims made by any political, religious, or academic authority, including (and this is where things become tricky and interesting) the authority that we assume in making *this* very claim" (Pedersen, 2020, p. 636). Pedersen thus presents the ontological turn as a critical examination of the conditions of possibility of anthropological knowledge, including phenomenology, in which he sees a "fetishisation" of everyday life and a "reactionary humanist" orthodoxy that functions by dividing reality and abstract concepts (p. 633).

Despite their violence, such statements do not indicate a reversal but rather a continuity with the history of anthropology and its privileged motifs: ethnography, understanding cultural diversity, the differences between the West and the rest of the world, and the primacy of relations. Above all, however, through the desire to modulate existing concepts on the basis of local conceptualisations, human beings are once again sidelined and relations continue to take precedence over *relata*, as indicated. Even if we agree with Pedersen's criticism of certain concepts in phenomenology, or more broadly of its approach, my own critique is different: saving the human entity as irreducible. This is where we see the radical reversal in anthropology.

Does Pedersen not act as if anthropology were, obviously, the study of otherness? His argument is a radicalisation of this, rather than a renewal. Beyond the conceptual revision and conceptual doubt proposed by Pedersen, could we not add a disciplinary doubt? What is anthropology at its core, and what is its purpose? What if, after questioning the specificity of social and cultural anthropology, what remains beyond doubt is the human being, the one that volumographic operations seek to extract, the one that does not interest social anthropology and the ethnography of others? What this approach seeks to question is ethnographic practice, the multiplication of relations that it has never ceased to highlight, and the fact of criticising this basic element, the human entity. Questioning the history of anthropology in this case means criticising its inability to make the human entity its topic.

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