The double dissociation\(^1\) of phenomenological and experimental methods in psychology; A case study

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Paper presented at the 21st Conference of the European Society for the History of the Human Sciences
27th – 31st August 2002

Introduction

In the nineteen sixties The Utrecht School became famous for its contributions to phenomenological psychology (Van Hezewijk, Stam, & Panhuysen, 2002) (see also the preceding papers in this conference by H. Stam). In this paper I will try to present the view we arrived at in our research on how Linschoten saw the relation between phenomenology and experimental methods, and on how different publications (in different languages) had different effects on the development of—at least some—parts of psychology in different countries. Apart from—Johannes Linschoten—who has published work both in German, in Dutch and in English I will focus on Amedeo Giorgi in the U.S. We will conclude that Linschoten has stimulated phenomenology in the Anglo-Saxon countries and has stimulated the experimental approach in The Netherlands.

Phenomenology in the Anglo-Saxon countries and on the European continent

As you may know, in the European continent, the interest in phenomenology is of a much earlier date, than in the Anglo-Saxon countries not in the least—of course—because the origins of phenomenology lay in the European continent.

Although during the nineteen fifties in the Anglo-Saxon countries there was some interest into phenomenologically oriented approaches in psychology, the vast increase of interest occurred only in the second part of the sixties and the seventies of the twentieth century (Binswanger, 1941; Buytendijk, 1950, 1953; Duncker, 1947; Gurwitsch, 1955; MacLeod, 1951; McGill, 1947; Plessner, 1964; Smith, 1950; Snygg, 1941; Van den Berg, 1952; Walker, 1957; Wellek, 1955).

This is probably due to the fact that most of the publications on phenomenology and related approaches were not in English, and any, if not most English speaking, philosophers and psychologists did not read German or French, and translations were hard to come by.

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\(^1\) I borrowed the term “double dissociation” from neuropsychology. A double dissociation is present when a group of patients A has a brain lesion X and a group of patients B has a lesion Y, and when A shows a functional disorder in task N but not in M and where group B shows a functional disorder in task M but not in N (Teuber, 1955). For instance, group A has a left frontal lesion resulting in problems with planning but not with spatial orientation, and group B with a left posterior lesion has a functional disorder in spatial orientation but not in planning then you know these functions have different locations in the brain. The – I admit partial — parallel here is in the locations (US vs Europe) and the lacunae of availability of texts in either phenomenological or “positivist” publications, respectively, leading to functional differences if not disorders.

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Duquesne and Phenomenology in the United States

But then, after 1960 in North America the volume of publications on phenomenology increased. Some publications that originally appeared in German, Dutch or French were translated into English (e.g. Buylendijk, 1967; Strasser, 1977), although a number of the more important European ones became available only much later (e.g. Kockelmans, 1987).

Interestingly many influential titles published after 1960 came from Duquesne University, either because Duquesne University Press was involved as the publisher, or because the authors or translators were affiliated with Duquesne (Elkin, 1970; Giorgi, 1965, 1966, 1968, 1970a, 1970b, 1975; Kwant, 1963; Luijpen, 1960; Strasser, 1963; Straus, 1965; Van Kaam, 1966; von Eckartsberg, 1972). This university also hosted the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* (volume 1 appeared in 1970).

At Duquesne at the end of the fifties Johannes Linschoten already had a reputation as a member of the Utrecht School of phenomenologists. So Linschoten was invited to Duquesne in 1961 by Prof. Van Kaam of Duquesne, a Dutch Holy Ghost Father and psychologist who introduced existentialism and phenomenology in Duquesne and who attracted a number of teachers and students. At that time Linschoten had recently, in 1958, published (in Dutch) the book on William James as a forerunner of phenomenological psychology (Linschoten, 1959).

Amedeo Giorgi

Giorgi was a young industrial psychologist in 1961. He was still in Manhattan College when Linschoten visited Duquesne but in spite of almost halving his salary he already had decided to accept a position at Duquesne University because of the phenomenological approach over there. He came to know about phenomenology due to Edward Hogan, who had joined Duquesne in 1957, and through Van Kaam. Giorgi became the one who tried to translate—if not transpose—European phenomenology into a phenomenological psychology. He had heard about Linschoten’s reputation as a phenomenologist, and hoped that Linschoten would provide him with a phenomenological method.

Giorgi missed most of Linschoten’s lectures at Duquesne, and spoke to him only a few hours in Pittsburgh. He also visited Linschoten at the Philadelphia hospital where Linschoten was admitted because of his heart attack during the EPA conference where he would give a paper. This was in April 1961.

In Pittsburgh, Giorgi and Linschoten had agreed to meet again during the summer in the Netherlands. So in the summer of 1961, Giorgi visited Utrecht to meet members of the Utrecht School, and especially Johannes Linschoten. Later, in 1963 he visited Linschoten again. At that time Giorgi was convinced that Linschoten was an important phenomenologist, and that he was doing work in phenomenological psychology. However, it surprised him during his visit that Linschoten had not even one Ph.D. student doing phenomenological work, and that (in 1963) he was said to be writing a book that insiders told him was not at all phenomenological, even hostile to phenomenology. Giorgi said, in his interview with the present authors:
What surprised me, though, was that none of [Linschoten’s] students were doing phenomenological dissertations. I couldn’t understand this and when I asked about it, I was told by both Linschoten and his students that he liked diversity. I said that diversity was ok, but not to have even one student doing phenomenological work—wasn’t that too much? No one had a response to that.

He also had the impression that Linschoten avoided him (which Giorgi attributed to his recent illness), or that he avoided questions about his phenomenological work. “I like diversity”, Linschoten said according to Giorgi when asked about it: “I like to keep people guessing” (Giorgi, 1999).

Two years later Giorgi asked again and he got the same answer followed by the remark “The next book will be phenomenological again”. Linschoten, however, died before the next book. We have not found any manuscript or fragment in his scientific legacy indicating what that next book would have been. Most likely the next book Linschoten wanted to write was a history of psychology.

It is important to realize that at that time Giorgi was relatively new to phenomenology. He had not yet read Husserl, was unfamiliar with other European authors (e.g. the work of Merleau-Ponty was introduced to him by Linschoten and one of his (non-phenomenological) students). Linschoten also introduced him to Karl Graumann, whom they visited by car in Bonn in a week-end. Giorgi, who reads Dutch and reads some of the Dutch work, agreed with Linschoten to translate the James book (Linschoten, 1968). But as he wanted to learn the method from these important Europeans, he kept asking about it. What procedures did they follow? Giorgi never got a satisfactory answer, though, and never learned from their written work how to do it. “So I decided I had to do it myself” said Giorgi in our interview with him. Notwithstanding this disappointing experience, Giorgi remained convinced that in psychology the best approach is phenomenology.

This is how Amedeo Giorgi became the “Dutch connection” in North America for phenomenological psychology. It is clear from the above, however, that he almost completely constructed the phenomenological approach himself. What Giorgi articulated is a substantial facet of what most of these continental authors had held implicitly for some time, regarding some of the subjects they discussed. Linschoten, for instance, in 1961 still wrote (in Dutch) that the “…use of the phenomenological method in psychology finds its justification in the subjectivity of the object of psychology” (Linschoten, 1962, p. 514).

Giorgi (1965; 1966) describes psychology as the study of human behavior and experience. As such it should be able to investigate all psychological phenomena, and try to solve all kinds of psychological problems. Experimental psychology can be characterized as an approach, a method and a content. The approach is empirical, positivistic, reductionistic, quantitative, deterministic, certitudinal, precise, predictive, analytic, repeatable, and independent of the observer, the method is characterized as “the

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5 Among others: Van der Meer, working on left-right polarization in phenomenal space, Köster working on smell, Zwaan on left and right in visual perception, and Broerse on language.
experimenter holds all factors constant except two, the independent variable and the dependent variable, and the systematically varies the independent variable and observes the effect on the dependent variable”.

. Experimental psychology to gives priority to method and claims that it can cover all realms of psychological phenomena; however, its content clearly has been reduced to what the method can help disclose. The “how” of gathering knowledge limits what can be known. Giorgi claims that there are other ways of knowing one’s subject, and that phenomenology is a way of knowing the subject in all respects, where the experimental approach necessarily is limited.

In accordance with the quoted fragment of Linschoten—at least apparently—Giorgi (1965, p. 236) claims that

“the phenomena which it would be possible to explore [in phenomenological psychology] are no longer determined exclusively by the implicit criteria of the scientific approach. Thus phenomena such as love, happiness, creativity, curiosity, etc. can be studied without apology. In addition, traditional phenomena such as perception, learning, motivation, etc. can be approached in fresh ways. The overall effect, therefore, of the phenomenological critique of the way experimental psychology has been practiced is to free psychology from artificial boundaries and restrictions in terms of the number and kinds of phenomena that can be studied, and also in the ways these phenomena can be approached. …

[Phenomenological psychology] believes not that psychology should be less scientific, but that it should be scientific in a different way.”

In the second article (1966, p. 39) he argues that phenomenology offers a type of (non-experimental) research and asks whether experimentation is at all possible in the human sciences. The answer is affirmative although the way of doing it “will be different from how they are currently practiced” (p. 49). Experimentation within the human sciences under the phenomenological approach aims at the qualitative aspect of experience, at the meaning for the participant of the experimental situation and at the aspects that are manipulated. It should focus on explicitation of the phenomenal experience instead of it’s analysis.

On the face of it, Giorgi’s position resembles the one Linschoten (1950) seemed to advocate earlier in the fifties. For instance, Linschoten suggested that in analyzing “movement” there is much more to investigate than the mere change of location when one sees something move. One can experience movement without the (physical) change of location (often called apparent movement), and one can experience change of location without experiencing movement (e.g. in stroboscopic effects). So in addition to the experimental research after the physical facts there should be a psychological investigation of the phenomena of movement (whether there is change of location or not); this necessarily implies a phenomenological approach. However, Linschoten obviously did not regard experimental research as obsolete for psychology, whereas Giorgi seems to regard it as obsolete in psychology. Giorgi sees phenomenological and experimental methods as conflicting approaches, whereas Linschoten is more concerned with the autonomy of psychology as a science. According to Giorgi the experimental approach is interested in phenomena that can hardly be interesting for psychology. Linschoten on the other hand sees them as complementary within psychology.
Linschoten developing another view

So Giorgi was looking for a phenomenological psychological method but was disappointed in Linschoten and other European authors, and after his visit in 1963 he started to develop his own version of phenomenological psychology. What Giorgi may have missed as a young and eager neonate in phenomenology, is that although Linschoten wrote (in German): “As a description and analysis of primary experience and the primary experienced phenomenology it is impossible to get around phenomenology” (“ist die Phänomenologie unumgänglich”) (1963, p. 181). It should be noted that Linschoten already explicitly restricted the contribution of phenomenology to the analysis of the foundations of science in general and psychology in particular. Phenomenology is a philosophy of the “Lebenswelt”. A phenomenological psychology that is nothing but a method for psychology has no right for its own place in psychology. So at about the same time that Giorgi visited Utrecht looking for the phenomenological method, Linschoten published the German article “Über die Unumgänglichkeit“, and was finishing his *Idolen van de Psycholoog*. In this (unfortunately never translated) work in Dutch Linschoten is very critical of phenomenological psychology, or so it seemed to his Dutch students and colleagues.

Linschoten, has always been very subtle about his position. In the early years of the nineteen sixties Linschoten, even more than before, stressed the Husserlian role of phenomenological analysis for the investigation into the presuppositions and conceptual foundations of psychology. He discarded a purely of phenomenological psychology interpreted as doing psychology with phenomenological methods. So his last book *Idolen* may be seen as the ultimate consequence of this approach, as the result of an analysis of what it is to do psychology the scientific way. He demonstrates cynically how others have gone astray by not accepting this relation between psychology and phenomenology. Just as Galileo, Descartes, Copernicus, Bacon learned that nature and its causes couldn't be inspected by the biased (allegedly naked) eye, so Linschoten argued that psychologists couldn’t see the other person unbiased by using the clinical eye without the aid of objectifying instruments.

Language creates an inescapable prison for itself. Words refer either to acts and things or to other words. Those words that refer to (other) words cannot enlighten us—they can only buzz. Add to this the self involvedness (zelfbetrokkenheid) of human persons i.e. psychologists, doing psychology about human persons i.e. psychologists, and there you are, stuck right in the middle of a paradox. It is evident that the idols of Bacon bias all human knowledge acquisition. So they will bias psychologists as well. To cut a long story short: if the phenomenologist aims at being “the true positivist” at the ideal of unbiased knowledge in encounters with “the other” as a person, then the psychologist must objectify. This refutes on psychology phenomenological psychology.

Linschoten consequently put his hope in some kind of operationism, in formal models and in formal analogons, in quantification of behavior, and in experiment. Those are the instruments that help to minimize the human biases and Baconian idols by objectifying them.
This idea was far from new for Linschoten. Earlier, in 1950, for instance when discussing the role of phenomenological and logical analysis of movement phenomena he wrote that phenomenology's task was to analyze the ultimate conditions and presuppositions that made a logical—to be read as experimental—analysis possible. And also in the book on James that was translated in German (Linschoten, 1961b) and English (Linschoten, 1968) but originally dates from 1959, the relation between the experimental and the phenomenological approach is much more sophisticated than it was presented by Giorgi.

The development of Linschoten in the Netherlands

So Giorgi initiated phenomenological psychology in the Anglo-Saxon world out of a selective reading of Dutch articles. How very different from what happened the Netherlands. Perhaps it is too much honour to say that Linschotens critical—if not cynical—Idolen was the only work to influence the development of Dutch psychology. There were, in the sixties and seventies, e.g. De Groot’s positively instructive book on Methodology (De Groot, 1961) and Kouwer’s ironical work on Personality (Kouwer, 1963). This trio of books was on the obligatory lists of psychology students in most Dutch universities till 1980 (if not later). As Hank Stam mentioned, in 1992, Idolen scored number one at the list of most important books in Dutch psychology of the last 100 years. The generation of psychologists who chose it are now retiring or are senior member of staff or professors. The effect has been that it is masochistic to call yourself a social constructivist or phenomenologist in Dutch academic psychology. Most would attribute this to Linschoten’s change of position from phenomenology to positivism focus.

This may be due to the narrow focus on this book in the Netherlands, but we see that different, now. Linschoten’s legacy includes work in which he gives a phenomenological analysis of a certain phenomenon, e.g. falling asleep. Other work is theoretical, e.g. about the relation of phenomenology to psychology. These publications indeed show a change from phenomenology as an approach within psychology to phenomenology as the foundation of psychology, outside psychology. But nowhere will one find an explicit refutation of experiments. Already in his early work on movement perception, in 1950 he argues that “before one can develop a theory on the perception of movement, and before one can safely experiment with movement phenomena, there should be agreement on the different […] phenomena of movement (can they be analyzed using one term “movement”?) and on the fundamental meaning of movement.” (1950, p. 669). What is interesting, however, is the moment he publishes this article—1950. It can be read, as maybe Giorgi did, as critical of “logical analysis” and as a plea for a phenomenological psychology. But it will be seen in a different light if one knows that it was written in the very year that Linschoten started his experiments for his magisterial Ph. D. study of binocularity in depth perception (Linschoten, 1956). This work includes very sharp and thorough theoretical work on all available depth perception theories at the time, from Hering and Helmholtz to Gestalt, as well as his own theory, and the experiments that were conducted in the Utrecht laboratory by him. It is a pity this work has not been translated in English, because it shows that Linschoten was not at all averse to experiments. The Ph. D thesis in German has 573 pages, a booklet of 226 figures, and the short reports of 130 experiments on
binocular depth perception on the question “How do we explain the fact that there are two retinas that produce a double test of proximal stimulations, and therefore two…. different projected visual arrangements, and the nevertheless we experience as only one image?” He especially worked on an explanation of the movement of corresponding stimulations into one image. Together with yet another report of work on induced movement (Linschoten, 1952), in which experimental work and phenomenological interpretation go hand in hand, and his review chapters for introductory psychology books in which he discussed work in experimental psychology (Linschoten, 1961a), it is safe to say that never Linschoten was averse to experiments, nor did he separate them from psychology.

**Conclusion**

Linschoten must have understood that most psychologists had come to believe that he was a true phenomenological psychologist. One wonders whether he tried to correct this idea in a Dutch article called *Fenomenologie en Psychologie* (Linschoten, 1962), where he addressed his audience frankly, stating that he was “less than some years before prepared to defend a radical phenomenological design of psychology. One of the reasons for that is the fruitfulness of reductive models in positivistic fashion. [For it is] in the positivistic design that psychology recently has been successful.” (1962, p. 113). So if one could have read everything Linschoten wrote without the handicap of the three languages he wrote in, his reputation and influence would have been different. Now we see that he stimulated phenomenological alternatives in the countries of positivism, and stimulated experimental work and positivism in the continent of phenomenology almost excluding the phenomenological alternative. That’s the way psychology developed a double dissociation.

**References**


