

## 16th Creph annual seminar 2022: Pick up your eyes: Mediated intuitions and evidence-producing devices

University of Liège, 2-6 May 2022

### *Presentation*

As it has been often highlighted, Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is resolutely marked by an **immediacy-rhetoric as far as intuitive knowledge is concerned**. In *Logical Investigations*, intuition, conceived as the « in person », the « in itself » (*selbst*) object's givenness, is opposed to the object's « simple thought » and to its « purely symbolic comprehension » (1901, §§ 7-8). Every object knowledge, reckons Husserl, supposes that its mediate representations lead *in fine* back to intuitive immediate representations through chains of fulfilment (ibid., § 18, § 60). It is even like this that an intuitive, to wit direct, knowledge of categorial forms « in themselves » becomes possible, inasmuch as it is possible to fulfil their signitive being-directed-towards by proper intuitions, founded on simple, even more original ones (ibid., §§ 45-46). Likewise, in *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, all knowledge presupposes the « originary » evidence, the « in person » givenness (1913, § 1, §§ 136-137). If mediate or « derived » evidences do exist, the phenomenological defiance resides, precisely, in showing how they are based on an immediate foundation (ibid., § 141). This is chiefly why we can speak of eidetic intuition, inasmuch as there is a – founded on simple, individual intuitions – essence givenness (ibid., § 3).

This ideal of knowledge by immediate or originary givenness has, nevertheless, been denounced from the outside and the inside of the phenomenological tradition alike. Jacques Derrida (1967), for instance, has notoriously criticised this **fantasy of the intuitionist theory of knowledge** and the phenomenological « principle of principles », **which privileges immediate or originary presence, condemning, for example, the derived and unaccomplished character of knowledge through signs**.

This sort of critique against Husserl resides mainly in the intertwined provisions of a hermeneutic conception and a structuralist vision of knowledge.

In Husserl's immediate proximity, the young Heidegger already (1919) conceives **of intuition as always necessarily « comprehensive »** and informed by meaning, the latter being linked to its inscription in ambient worlds already discursively or even pragmatically significative, thereby engaging in a **hermeneutical turn of phenomenology**. Outside this tradition, Wilfrid Sellars' critique of the « myth of the

given» lying on the foundation of empiricist thought (1956, 1968) unravels itself along the same lines and it is to be chiefly prolonged in John McDowell's work (1994, 1998).

Besides, within the field of social sciences, **immediacy of intuition is questioned from the viewpoint of its social constitution**. In France, for instance, Marcel Mauss (1924, 1934), Claude Lévy-Strauss (1950, 1960) and Pierre Bourdieu (1972, 1979) have successively proposed critiques of the originarity of phenomenal experience, insisting on the notions of the «techniques of the body», the «structural unconscious» and the «class habitus», respectively, three concepts designating the **cultural mediations whose intervention on the sensuous' data's intuition can be observed by the sociologist**.

These two critiques converge in Derrida's work as well as that of Paul Ricoeur (1969) who has not ceased to operate «detours» through the human «sciences» (psychoanalysis, structural anthropology, history, etc.) so as to question the immediacy of intuitions, like the one of «cogito», and substitute it to a knowledge, no longer originary and **sense-giving**, but derived and interpretative.

However, if we do return to **Husserl's** work itself, we underscore **his continuous interrogation of the notion of intuition and its apparent immediacy**. In *Logical Investigations*, intuition is deemed as the fulfilment of intentions of signification, and, in this respect, strongly oriented, in its comprehension, by the mediation of – sometimes very complex – intentions, that it is bringing to fulfilment. In this respect, far than being immediate, categorial intuitions are not potentiated unless through acts of formalisation that specify the forms-to-be-presented to intuition. Similarly, as indicated in *Ideas*, eidetic intuitions are merely potentiated by abstractive acts which, chiefly by means of imaginary variations, elicit general significations that singular experiences must illustrate. Founded evidences ought to be produced.

Husserl, one ought to say so, was from the outset holding **mathematical knowledge** as the privileged object of his preoccupations. Nevertheless, in this domain, **opening one's eyes and grasping what is immediately given would manifestly not suffice for one to know**. Like Husserl's contemporary mathematical developments had spectacularly demonstrated, mathematical knowledge, on the contrary, presupposes very complex devices of evidence production. Besides, this is the observation of his first work, *Philosophy of Arithmetics* (1891), which underscores that beyond the few first natural numbers, the essential of mathematical knowledge is founded, instead of on «proper representations» of pluralities and on intuitive operations of assemblage or scission of pluralities, on a numerical system founded on a symbolic representation of numbers in a decimal system as well as on the algebraic calculus' operations that yield all sense to rational numbers, to negative numbers, to imaginary numbers etc. What, hence, constitutes for Husserl a slightly destabilising observation shall, in the years to come (1886-1901), be fully integrated and assumed in a theory of «multiplicities», corresponding to formal systems which characterise every entity via its structural and operational relations to all the other entities. The same obtains in contemporary geometry, where evidence does presuppose not only the intuition-producing constructions, like it was the case in Kant, but also a systematic characterisation by means of axioms and rules of inference, which do not arise from immediate intuition but presuppose an irreducible logico-symbolic mediation.

For this very same reason, Husserl later on pinpointed (1936) **that mathematics' knowledge is greatly mediated by the scientific tradition in which it subscribes itself**. Evidences that present themselves to each generation of mathematicians enormously depend upon systems progressively produced by anterior generations. Hence, there is an inevitable historicity of intuition in mathematics.

Dominique Pradelle in his recent work (2020), following Jean Cavailles (1938a, 1938b) and Jean-Toussaint Desanti (1968), has demonstrated precisely that, namely that far from residing in the immediacy of intuition, mathematics' knowledge presupposes a whole, a very diversified one actually, of evidence-producing devices.

However, what holds paradigmatically for mathematics holds as well for a large number, even the totality, of founded evidences – in the domain of knowledge, but also probably of ethics, aesthetics, etc. – and even maybe already for those so called «simple» intuitions that form sensuous experience.

Instead of taking the immediacy of intuition for granted, it is therefore more useful to make evident and **study the diversity of evidence-producing devices that simultaneously potentiate and mediate evidence.**

In the framework of the philosophy of mind, it does matter as well to take an interest in the **mental act of intuition**. In this regard, contemporary literature makes room for two principal options (Chudnoff 2011). According to *doxastic* theories, intuition is **reduced to a belief or to a disposition to believe that  $p$**  (Williamson 2004, 2005, 2007; Goldman et Pust 1998; Gopnik and Schwitzgebel 1998). According to *perceptualist* theories, on the contrary, intuition is a ***sui generis* experience, analogous to perceptual experience**- a «quasi-perceptual» experience by virtue of which it *seems* to the subject that  $p$  (Bealer 1998, 1999, 2002 ; Huemer 2001, 2005). Although such intellectual experiences (*intellectual seemings*) could *prima facie* justify the belief that  $p$ , they are not identical to the latter — in the same way that the perceptive experience of the blue sky can *prima facie* justify the judgment of perception «the sky is blue», without being identical to it. Concisely: we are dealing with *predoxastic* states in which an abstract state of things is immediately «given» to the subject (Bengson, 2015).

This is why the theory of *intellectual seemings* has sometimes been explicitly likened to the Husserlian notion of intuition (Wiltsche 2015). Some also maintain that intellectual experience that  $p$  is «immediate» in the sense that it is based on the sheer *comprehension* of  $p$  (Sosa 1998, 2006, 2007, 2009). This version of perceptualism already reminds that of proto-phenomenologists like Franz Brentano (1925) or Carl Stumpf (1939), who discerned in immediate evidence a state «producing a certain illumination» (*einleuchtend*) on the basis of the sole comprehension of concepts themselves. According to this conception, it is in effect possible that intuition, as an occurrent state, be conditioned by certain factors (attention, comprehension of certain concepts, mastering of certain signs or mathematical symbols etc.) without being though a source of *mediate* justification. Even conditioned, intuition offers an immediate justification in the sense that, in certain cases, understanding  $p$  *suffices* for having an intuition that  $p$ .

Arguments in favour of the perceptualist theory of intuition have been recently developed by Elijah Chudnoff (2011, 2013), Berit Brogaard (2013a, 2013b, 2014) and John Bengson (2015). Study and evaluate these arguments and the theories that they oppose constitutes another interesting road so as to interrogate the eventual immediacy of intuition.

The seminar could articulate itself in **several axes of reflection:**

- a first section, an historical one, could **re-evaluate the sources (Cartesian, Kantian, etc.) of the phenomenological theory of intuition** so as to see up to what extent the notion of intuition is effectively inextricably linked to an ideal (even a myth) of immediacy.
- a second section, still an historical one, could **re-evaluate the Husserlian theory of intuition** and its eventual naive adhesion to the fantasy of immediacy.
- a third section could **question the immediacy of sensuous intuition.**
- a fourth section could **question the immediacy of founded intuitions (categorical, eidetic, etc.), in the domain of knowledge, of moral judgment or of aesthetic judgment and, concretely, elucidate the diversity of «evidence-producing devices»,** to wit the elements without the assistance of whom intuitions would not have been «immediately» possible.
- a fifth section could **study the social and cultural processes favouring the production of evidence.**
- finally, a sixth section could **tackle the mental act of intuition** and its link to other acts like that of perception and belief.

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