



BSP

British Society
for Phenomenology
Annual Conference
2020 - Online

*Engaged
Phenomenology*

Thursday 3 - Saturday 5 Septmeber

Accessible online until Sunday 13 September

Fabio Tommy Pellizzer.

Independent

‘The Sounds of the Manifold. Towards a Phenomenology of Noise’

Phenomenologically speaking, things are always constituted through unity-of-manifold structures. To what extent can phenomenology account for a phenomenon that escapes what appears to be the very ‘grammar’ of phenomenological analysis? In fact, while a thing is always experienced as a focal point that brings the manifold into unity, noise is more like a halo effect, i.e. a scattered multiplicity that surrounds the thing. Such a multiplicity does not overlap but on the contrary contrasts with the experience of things as meaningful. In this light, noises do not come from the thing as meaningful, for their source lies elsewhere – somehow in the thing, but not in its sense.

In part one, building upon Heidegger’s analysis of tools and signs, I define the phenomenon of noise as a disruption within the relational texture of experience. For example, the noise of the jackhammer presents itself as a multiplicity that cannot be inscribed within the unity-of-manifold structure that constitutes the jackhammer as a tool. The noise ‘intersects’ –in the form of a disturbance – our experience of the jackhammer as a tool. On this basis, noise can be defined as the very background of things, as always ‘surrounded’ by (and ‘embedded’ in) sensations that cannot be reduced to unity-of-manifold structures (e.g. relations of usefulness).

In part two, I discuss noise as a ‘relative’ phenomenon, i.e. as something that can be meaningful but also highly invasive. Firstly, I consider how noises can be reintegrated in new forms of unity of manifold, as in the case of acoustic signals like hooters or alarms (which I describe by contrast to Heidegger’s discussion of car’s turn signals). Secondly, I consider particular experiences of noise drawing from both fiction and everydayness, such as background noises in Star Trek’s star ships, noise pollution, noises that come from within ourselves (e.g. heartbeat).

This paper is part of a preconstituted panel with Giuseppe Torre and Basil Vassilicos: “Phenomenologies of Noise - Three studies”. See preconstituted panels overview.

In 2019 I received a PhD from Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, with a thesis entitled “The Unity of the Manifold. Heidegger’s Interpretation of the Synthesis between Husserl and Kant”. My research interests include phenomenology (Heidegger, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty), Kant’s philosophy and current debates on materiality and agency. My recent investigations aims at developing, in dialogue with archaeology and anthropology, a phenomenological approach to tools, signs and artefacts.

Giuseppe Torre.

University of Limerick, Ireland

‘Noise, Phenomena and the Digital Psychosis’

With respect to digital technologies, noise is something that is at once both fought and sought. We may wish to minimise noise in communications but require it for encrypting the very content communicated. We may wish to minimise noise when recording sound but also want to use it to improve the fidelity of the recording process.

The catch is that noise is both an abstract idea and a concrete thing that does not sit comfortably in relation to systems that are deterministic/probabilistic, such as digital technologies. This is a fact that computer scientists know well but that is systematically overlooked in order to safeguard and improve the functioning of digital technologies, such as digital instruments. Indeed beyond the plethora of different kinds of noises, the comparison between analogue and digital technologies highlights the existence of just two types of noise: one that is naturally occurring (noise) and one that is humanly constructed (pseudo-noise).

Digital technologies operate by moving from noise to pseudo noise, in order to then 1) crystallise reality into mathematical constructs and 2) create realities from mathematical constructs. This makes the digital realm a type of technology different from any other, namely, one in which noise is fiercely fought and used for the digitisation process but then relentlessly sought, and always denied, within the digital realm.

This observation points to at least two further implications: one is that noise may point to essential differences between analogue and digital technologies; the second is that the presence or absence of noise may lead to either crippled or diverse phenomenologies. To this extent, digital technology, rather than revealing by challenging (Heidegger), has more to do with enabling a psychotic stance towards reality - one in which reality has been made to conform to our mathematically constructed idea of it ... and one which might be too much even for a phenomenologist to overcome. These arguments will be developed from the perspective of a digital art practitioner.

This paper is part of a preconstituted panel with Fabio Tommy Pellizzer and Basil Vassilicos: “Phenomenologies of Noise - Three studies”. See preconstituted panel overviews.

I am a lecturer in Digital Arts at the University of Limerick (Ireland). My research interest lies at the crossroads between digital art practices, open source technology/culture and philosophy. These interests respond to a questioning of the relationships between art and technology and that has so far led me to question under what forms and forces truly creative efforts may, or may not, arise.

Basil Vassilicos.

Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland

‘Noise as positive phenomenon: assessing the constraints of a “no-noise” principle in phenomenology’

Noise, under a myriad of forms, seems to be a basic fact of the universe with which a number of sciences have to wrestle. It thus seems like a phenomenon or group of phenomena from which philosophy cannot escape and for which it ought to muster some sort of account. In this paper, we propose to assess the philosophical resources available for such an account, with particular scrutiny on the capabilities of a phenomenological approach to noise. Our hypothesis is that phenomenological philosophy may be hamstrung when it comes to noise. On the one hand, this has to do with its more or less externalist leanings to reject hylomorphism and any corresponding notion of raw sense data; on the other, this concerns its Gestalt-like commitment to the view that the content of mental episodes has its origins in, but cannot be reduced to, non-independent inputs. While both such commitments garner much support today from philosophers of different stripes, the question is whether they dispose phenomenological philosophy to operate on the basis of a ‘no-noise’ principle, whereby noise either falls outside its purview or is only understood as something that is disturbing or lacking in relation to experience.

A predilection towards such a no-noise principle in phenomenological philosophy will be established through an analysis of Ingarden’s phenomenological aesthetics. Taking Ingarden as the focus presents a couple advantages. First, the workings of a no-noise principle can be clearly demonstrated in terms of the latter’s analyses of both cognitive-perceptual and aesthetic experience, and can be probed in terms of whether he can account for noise as positive phenomenon, that is, as constitutive of an aesthetic or cognitive property. What’s more, insofar as Ingarden’s approach coheres with a number of strands of phenomenological research pursued after Husserl, our analysis raises a question about whether other phenomenological perspectives have embraced or avoided a no-noise principle, as for instance can be seen when it comes to contemporary interest in the concept of ‘aboutness’ or intentional content.

This paper is part of a preconstituted panel with Fabio Tommy Pellizzer and Giuseppe Torre: “Phenomenologies of Noise - Three studies”. See preconstituted panel overviews.

Basil studied at Penn State in the U.S.A. and completed his PhD at the University of Leuven, after which he taught and researched there for a number of years. From 2016, he has been Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, in Limerick, Ireland. Recent research topics include the philosophy of self-conscious emotions, collective freedom, and the relationship between language and gestures.
