



DOCUMENT

UFD0048  Inigo Wilkins

Acid Hegel in K-Space?

An extract from Inigo Wilkins's long awaited *Irreversible Noise* unwraps the black box of sonic perception to reveal the phenomenodelic delights within

The understanding of an object via the extraction of invariants allows for an intrinsic definition of an object outside of any extrinsically imposed framework, which is the great benefit of the group theoretical generalization of space (e.g. Riemannian manifolds), and of category theory and homotopy type theory as unifying frameworks for contemporary mathematics. However, the invariants should not be hypostatized as the essence of the object and the variations overlooked as mere noise. The way in which objects vary are often critical to their definition: it is the variations that reveal the invariants. There is a dialectical reciprocity between variance and invariance, and this is related to the complementarity between continuity and discontinuity. In particular, the morphology of an object is defined both by the local continuity of its regular points and those critical points where there is a discontinuity or singularity. The singularity is a variation in the continuity or invariance between one regular point and the next, but it is a topological invariant in the continuous variation of the object's morphology.

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To understand a hidden causal process, or 'black box', merely observing it will not be helpful. In order to infer the causal structure or process governing its behaviour it is necessary to perturb the object in various ways - rotate it, shake it, subject it to noise - the outcome can then be observed, hypotheses

formed, and further tests devised. Just as topological transformations may reveal an object's essential geometry, causal transformations reveal essential causal structure, and perceptual variations reveal essential qualitative attributes. The exploratory ascertainment of invariants and variations yield a systematic knowledge of the object. The variations and invariants defining the morphological eidetics of an object are not fixed and context-free characteristics but are defined relative to a scale of analysis, level of abstraction, and interpretative situation, so they should really both be understood as the way an object covaries under specific conditions.

Kant's distinction between phenomenon and noumenon highlights a problem that is of a different order than the spatio-temporal perspectivalism that sound studies seems fixated on, which is that 'the sublation of the empirical perspectivism of experience is still limited by transcendental perspectivism'.¹ Departing from a strictly Kantian understanding we may define the transcendental framework as those conditions that structure the possibility of cognition, those enabling constraints that define the human as a suffering, thinking, and acting person. This is a more Sellarsian perspective in which the transcendental is not fixed but open to change. Constraints are both hindering and empowering to varying degrees, indeed they facilitate by restricting since without constraints there is just entropy.²

1. G. Catren, 'What is Ensoument?' in F. Hecker, *Formulations* (Cologne: Koenig Books, 2016).

2. The notion of constraint here is based on the complex systems account as developed by thinkers like Juarrero and Deacon, and should be distinguished from its understanding in the ecological theory of perception, where constraint has a narrower definition as the reciprocal of affordances, both

The transcendental conditioning factors operate at many levels, including physical, chemical, and biological constraints, as well as cultural, linguistic, and economic constraints. The former are 'natural' while the latter are artifactually constructed and in some sense 'non-natural' or normative. There is a certain universality to some constraints but many are of course diversely distributed over populations, and highly uneven.

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The whole history of the artifactual elaboration of mind, by which various natural and normative constraints have been overcome or transformed,³ can be understood as a process of incremental alterations and sudden shifts in transcendental perspective. Catren explains that since humans are able to formulate problems that cannot be answered within the language in which they are posed, and to construct new formalisms that breach this apparent transcendental circumscription, that there are no fundamental limitations to the capacity to vary the transcendental perspective. He gives as an example the progression from natural numbers to rational numbers, real numbers, and complex numbers.⁴ We could also think of the invention of various audio technologies (e.g. phonography, sonar, time-stretching, granular synthesis) and musical techniques (e.g. syncopation, electroacoustic manipulation of concrete sound, free jazz, DJing) as transforming the conditions of possibility of sound and listening. Catren calls the possibility space of transcendental perspectives K-space, and argues that just as knowledge of the phenomenon can be gained by kinesthetic modifications of our empirical standpoint so it is possible to asymptotically grasp the 'phenomenon' by moving in K-space.

being structured by the 'effectivities' of the organism (i.e. its possibilities for action).

3. This understanding comes from various talks given by Reza Negarestani. Also see Glass Bead issue 1, Logic Gate: The Politics of the Artifactual Mind, <<http://www.glass-bead.org>>.

4. G. Catren, 'A Plea for Narcissus', Talk given at the conference 'Continental and Analytic Kantianism: The Legacy of Kant in Meillassoux's and Sellars' Realism' held at University College Dublin, June 15-17th.

The concept of the phenomenon is intended as a replacement for the strict opposition between the phenomenal and noumenal in Kant's philosophy.⁵ Rather than the thing-for-us and the thing-in-itself the phenomenon is a relative absolute around which unfolds a sheaf of empirical and transcendental perspectives. My argument is that it is necessary to articulate the relationship between the naturalistic and the normative, between sense and sensibility, by integrating rather than either fusing or refusing (or worse, con-fusing) their quasi-autonomous explanatory-descriptive powers. In this way we can open our ears to the phenomenon of noise. This may involve processes of the 'electro-acoustic sheafification' of sound material,⁶ it also requires imaginative and kinesthetic variations, the discovery and invention of new evidence and hypotheses, the development of technologies, the creation of concepts, and the social-interactive transformation of norms. Following the understanding of the psychedelic as the process of self-realization that a mind undergoes when unhooked from the 'natural attitude' of perception, Catren describes motion in K-space as a 'phenomenodelic' operation. Acid Hegel, if you like.

While theories such as PCT and cognitive morphodynamics have to some degree 'furnished' the black box of cognition and perception with representational content that is no longer grounded on symbol manipulation, phenomenodelic psychonauts may further perturb its hidden kaleidoscopic interior, inducing unimaginable torsions in the space of social interaction, and unleashing a cascade of symmetry breaking transformations that alter the naturalistic and normative conditions of possibility for thought. That is, we move beyond the description

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5. Catren, 'What is Ensoument'.

6. F. Zalamea, 'Electro-acoustic Sheafification', in Booklet accompanying Eric Frye's LP *On Small Differences in Sensation* (Cejero, 2016).

of what cognition is and unfold what it can be and ought to be (i.e. its unbound naturalistic-technological capacities and normative-ethical significance). Speculatively propelled from the gravity well of any cognitive terrestrial ground, this is the irreversible noise that shatters all expectations and blasts out the boundaries of parochially restricted listening subjectivity: the phantastically improbable sound that sends the dancefloor whirling into the outer cosmos, convulsed by polyrhythmic paroxysms and engulfed in an ultrachromatic blaze. Phenomenon goes boom!
