METHODS II: THINKING THE ANTHROPOCENE

Failure to follow the rules within the aesthetic and academic realms leads to precisely the same result as refusal to adhere to them elsewhere within society. Often: punishment, dismissal, repression. However, the breaking of rules is also necessary for development, for the pursuit of the new. Thus, in certain instances, failure is positive, progressive. Ideas improve. The play of language participates in the improvement. Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. Plagiarism embraces an author’s phrase, makes use of his expressions, erases one idea, and replaces it with another idea, with new context, new vectors of thought. This work uses the work of others, randomly

1 The Anthropocene—a concept advanced first by Paul Crutzen—is the proposed term for the current geological epoch. As its name suggests, the epoch (climatically, geologically, etc.) is now sufficiently changed by the actions of humanity (by the burning of fossil fuels and the use of nuclear materials, especially) that it is recognizable in the stratigraphic record. The term also applies to thinking broadly about the position and role of humanity in relation to the planet and life on the planet. It is the contention of this text that that relationship is defined by noise and only a more thorough understanding and acceptance of noise will allow for a change in the relationship.
arranged and assembled, as a jumping off point, a means of stimulating new pathways for thought. Perhaps the ordering of this text lacks the full intention of an authorial perspective, but it is, regardless of its aesthetic merits, organized.

This is an account of the effort towards composing a certain kind of text: a thorybological text, a noisy work of noise theory. It is strange, because this is not a work of philosophy as such; it is a work of prolonged heresy against conventional notions of sense, clarity, meaning, a heresy that is continuously heretical, never allowing itself to accept even that heresy is sufficient. This work, in its discontinuity, proceeds by means of two movements: the straight line (advance, increase, insistence of an idea, a position, a preference, an image) and the zigzag (reversal, contradiction, reactive energy, denial, contrariety, the movement of a Z, the letter of deviance: a letter I have been marked by since birth, since the assignation of my patronym [le nom du père]). There are gaps, holes, ruptures inherent in this advancing discontinuity. Much of this writing is a struggle to address this lack by inventing a new discourse that allows noise to come into the vicinity of knowledge in a relationship that is neither ignorance nor domination.

The failures of this text are apt to take two distinct but related forms: lack of clarity in message and the limitations of externally imposed form. The lack of clarity is due to the character and applications (in theory and praxis) of noise. It is purposefully indistinct, continually evasive, ever in flux. Thus any work on noise is a process of wrangling its subject/object/concept into semi-stable formations and articulations such that a thesis might be provisionally expounded. The limitations of the theoretical text (even in its varied experimental formations, such as they are allowed by externally imposed format constraints) also mark a distinct failure. This text will never be noise. It will address noise, pursue noise, and achieve a level of noise higher than average, but it will always be read as signal. Linguistic formulations cannot help but be endowed with meaning, whether intentionally or apophenically. The text is marked by these inevitable failures. It does not deny them
or seek to evade them. Rather it uses their tension, traces their edges, their borders, their frontiers. Nothing supports the text except the intensity with which it draws on and pushes against itself.

Even though we are not accustomed to thinking of it in this way, the production of knowledge always puts something at risk. The obvious risks of this text are the above-mentioned failures, but there are others, including the tendency to use noise to repress and oppress, to dominate and drown out dissent. These elements of noise are contrary to those that emphasize the periodic significance of spontaneity, uncertainty, creativity, self-organization, and self-balancing powers in the world even as they often exceed our powers to control them. The latter are the elements of noise that this inquiry seeks to bring to light and advocate for, but they are not the only or even the most common articulations of noise. They are, however, a means of counteracting the exploitative expressions of noise. Negative feedback is countered only by positive feedback and practices of regulation by practices of multiplicity, indeterminacy, and differentiation.

Unlike more conventional philosophical approaches that assimilate only those phenomena that can be rendered commensurable—via abstract conceptualization or categorization—thorybology addresses what remains noisy, heretical, heterogeneous, constitutively inassimilable within general cognitive systems, whether they are advanced philosophical speculations or common sense. Thorybology haunts the margins of philosophy, gnosis, mysticism, science fiction, and even religions. Instead of telling us what its objects of study mean, thorybology show us how we might use them to think. Thorybology seeks a genuinely weird way of thinking, a weirder thought. The interactions of a thorybological inquiry are dynamic and continuous, with feedback and feedforward loops connecting different levels with each other and cross-connecting machine processes with human responses. But far from simply juxtaposing these variables, thorybology multiplies their reciprocal relations through one of them as a factor,
and precisely here through noise. The search for order, rigor, and pattern is by no means abandoned. How could it be? Our very nature demands the constant interplay of order and disorder, noise and signal. The questions of thorybology instead concern application: how to turn abstract principles of noise into action, into a progressive politics of interruption.

What is involved is, naturally, something quite complex: it uses the productive relationship between theory and practice, adapting experimental art strategies to the exploration of theoretic questions for formal and physical experimentation. It makes use of the cut-ups, the fold-ins, the collaborations to disrupt conventional expressions of authority and control in order to foster an environment capable of generating novel artistic, theoretical, and sociopolitical formations. Let us follow this trajectory. Everything down to the last detail is shaped accordingly. The question of the subject of knowledge can only be explored meaningfully from an individual position, through the dissolution or dismantling of transcendent structures understood as subversion of power.

This attempt to codify, at least provisionally, thorybology as a field of study revisits the failure of clarity, however. Because of its relational nature with signal and meaning, one cannot know noise while it is noise. To define noise is merely to indicate a possible meaning, which will always be the opposite of another equally possible meaning, which, when diurnally interpolated with the first meaning, will point toward a third meaning which will in turn elude definition because of the fourth element that is missing. Is it possible to maintain a perpetual frontier? Perhaps, perhaps not. But thorybology demands it, benefits from the subtle power of its incoherence. These constraints become advantages, of course, once it is understood that the goal of the experiment is not to communicate, but to provoke understanding by other means.

The point to emphasize here is that the text is an experiment. It is offered not as a proof or assertion of truth but as a trial or test. It plays with an impossible choice, faulty and transgressive, from the dissident minority rather than from...
authority, from the part rather than the whole, from heterodoxy rather than from dogma. Thorybology constructs itself, and must continue to construct itself, from the order neither of the sensible nor the intelligible but in the order of making, or generating. Chance produced that rare moment in which the whole symbolic system accumulated and forced thought to yield. Yet this research does not deal with nature or knowledge, with things-in-themselves, but with the way all these things are tied to our collectives and to subjects. It looks to answer, or approach, the following: What is the noise of everyday life? How does this noise, this being-as-noise, think the Anthropocene? How can we more fully understand our being-as-noise? How can our being-as-noise and the thinking of it change how we coexist in the world, in the Anthropocene? In my study, these premises are themselves the object. It is characteristic of philosophical writing that it must continually confront the question of representation. So this text is, ideally, a way forward without knowing where we might end up.

How this work was composed: fragment by fragment, according to chance. Noise is relationally defined as that which ruptures totality, the gaps, holes, and absences in the very possibility of transcendental unity. These fragments and ruptures, however, are configured in thorybological research not so much as an opposition but as a synergistic interaction. The text thus will swerve and digress at times, in the interests of pursuing an interesting idea, rather than delivering a straightforward chronology, in the belief that this will do more to create a sense of the stuff of the theory than a mere recitation of facts could hope to achieve. Following on from there, this text is not only an idea, a theory, but an experience of noise that takes advantage of assembled fragments and the ways they are connected to one another to open up doors to thought that were previously unimagined.