Noise Thinks the Anthropocene: An Experiment in Noise Poetics

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REINHABITING THE EARTH

An indirect approach is necessary for explicating this text, justifying its claims and warrants. This text, this text, beckons us neither forward nor backward, but sideways, into an open field of activity. Into an indirect and undecidable wandering down new paths of thought. Because scholars are expected not just to reproduce knowledge but to produce innovative thought (figured not just as a recombination of good quotations but as opening new arguments and lines of investigation), thorybology is designed, much as other remix theories, to offer a unique means of answering this demand for complicity. It allows a researcher to use recombination as a means of generating new lines of investigations, as a way of interrupting traditional modes of thought to allow for the possibility of opening out into new arguments. This recombination, especially when coupled with indeterminate or improvisational practices, can produce uncertainty, doubt, ambiguity, hesitation, insecurity, anxiety. While not commonly regarded as positive outcomes, these are necessary standpoints for addressing and acting upon the contemporary crises of the world, crises where certainty and fixity have not resolved the problems and, in some cases, have exacerbated them. The process of knowing in thorybology exposes us all to immense discomfort, misinterpretations, imaginary convergences, and
forced couplings that, while divergent from many academic norms, elicit lines of investigation and thought that could not otherwise have been conceived. The endless working and re-working which this text underwent, the nagging at a particular notion until it fit in, the progress from an embryo to an often very differently formulated final concept, the amendments and the afterthoughts are the content of thorybology. Thus, to reiterate, I have here chosen to highlight process, to treat form as an element of content.

Misinterpretation is inevitable in all modes of expression. Signals are not pure, but rather rely on noise as both the carrier channel in any transmission as well as the element of *différance* necessary to modulate a signal to produce information. From this point of view, philosophy is in a perpetual state of digression or digressiveness, of interpreting and reinterpreting misinterpretations. This is but one element of *noise* latent in philosophy. In tracing digressions, paths outside the regular boundaries of control and discipline, thorybology can establish itself within philosophy. It is difficult to know how to directly approach noise. Noise is often marked by warnings and prohibitions: Behold the Outside, you shall not explore it. But to know something means to inhabit its perspective, to incorporate it, to become it, to become one with it, to interpret it. This is not the case for noise. To inhabit, incorporate, become, or interpret noise is to cause noise to become signal, to cease to be or function as noise but instead as *noise*. Of what use is noise, then, if not to introduce some play (some entropy, some information) into our works? In its most creative and favorable articulations, the ideas keep coming, exerting a subterranean influence: fragmentary, primarily in the form of digressions from, or footnotes and appendices to, texts on other subjects. But even in terms of general theory, it is important to recognize that all knowledge is produced by separation, delimitation, restriction; there is no absolute knowledge of a whole. And through every separation, delimitation, and restriction there is the creation of noise, a creation of an outside and background to meaning and knowledge.
Despite an inability to inhabit noise without rendering it noise, the pursuit of knowledge through inhabitation is a component of thorybological inquiry. Thorybology is not simply a field of study devoted to a definitional study of noise-as-such, but rather an (in)discipline devoted to using noise within an ethics of responsibility to reimagine and change how we might coexist in the world. Reinhabiting the earth means, to start with, no longer living in ignorance of the conditions of our existence. This is a primary goal of thorybology and why I insist on connecting my noise research to questions of ethics, politics, and ecology. Thorybology is designed to create concepts for problems that necessarily change, for crises and moments of undecidability. We must question ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset. Certain identities, institutions, and power relations are treated as unquestionable reality, even when they are not as they appear. Noise politics would seek to undermine these unquestioned institutions and thought patterns, and scramble their codes as much as possible so as to highlight our being-as-noise, to prompt action in the places of complacent acceptance. This is not a foolproof method, especially if it is not fully articulated. Seen most recently in the policies of many global conservative politicians, the questioning and dismissal of norms carried out without a strict ethics of responsibility can be used to limit freedom and equality rather than enhance them. As stated several times above, noise is neutral, a tool that can be put to use for various purposes. The best way to approach thorybology is to read it as a challenge: to pry open the vacant spaces that would enable you to build your life and those of the people around you into a being-as-noise that challenges repressive norms as it seeks a sustainable ethics of responsibility and coexistence with the other.

With noise is born disorder and its opposite, the world. Noise traces the boundaries of how we have drawn our marked (the world, culture, society) and unmarked spaces (disorder, nature, the void). Thus by listening to noise, we
better understand how we have articulated the divisions and frontiers of knowledge, where our choices (both ignorant and informed, magnanimous and self-serving, short-sighted and prescient) are leading us, and what hopes it is still possible to have. The future must be cracked open, so that we might chase our horizons towards the universal possibilities of the Outside. There is nothing particularly difficult in this noise. The question is not: What is it? or: Is it true? but: Does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body? What new ethics does it suggest? What new means of coexistence does it allow? Any new pathways for thought or lines of investigation that are made possible are a victory for uncertainty, randomness, and chaos.¹

Writing is organization of data, both selection out of chaos and, in contrast, turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one’s attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking, and unexpected. This articulation of writing is not a way of finding excuses for a lack of original-

¹ A brief digression is perhaps in order here. Much of the ethics and politics of thorybology articulated in this section is based upon a certain consequentialist ethics that asks, primarily: Does it work, does this act or thought or practice bring about greater equality, justice, or means of coexistence? This is a useful but troubling line of inquiry. While the ethics stated herein are articulated with a specific arc toward greater justice, equality, and coexistence with the other, it cannot be stated often enough that these practices and methods do not guarantee such an outcome. Indeed, one might here note that at present the most common association with the concept “not is it true but does it work?” would be the rise in so-called “fake news.” Whether it is termed fake news, propaganda, misinformation, advertising, or rhetorical persuasion, a system that allows for ends to become detached from the means of achieving them must be closely monitored. Such a system can work well in a society where the public can be relied upon for their discernment but sets a dangerous precedent in a society where the public can only be relied upon for credulity and partisanship.
ity, but of affirming that originality and creativity are nothing more than the chance handling of a combination. Thought does not take place without doubts, detours, and repentances. We enter noise discourse, then, by any point whatsoever. None matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged. Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? While potentially interesting questions, within thorybological research and development, a final and definitive answer cannot be expected for them. Each individual inquiry will offer its own answers, define its own vectors, reach its own conclusions, enact its own practices. So let go of the drive to discover what this text represents, and begin to see what it does in the world. Every concept will branch off toward other concepts striving for answers to problems (climate change, mass extinction, coexistence, political and social equality) that, through noise, are connected to each other, and participate in a co-creation of the means and understanding to sustainably rehabit the earth.
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