Noise Thinks the Anthropocene: An Experiment in Noise Poetics

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Frontiers describe what is beyond as well as what is enclosed. Any demarcation of signal is also the demarcation of its noise, of its other, of noise as the perpetually ungrounded, mutable, and self-differing; noise as the outside, the other of meaning, order, and structure. Structure without life is the monotonous repetition of the same. But life without structure is impossible. A continual and constant noise state is not just beyond the realm of human desire but also human capacity. We require patterns, a degree of repetition and routine, to exist, to live as anything that might be recognized as human. Noise politics does not deny that. Noise politics describes a program for interruptive action, even repeated interruptive action against any possible stasis—noise politics is against any “end” to history—but it does not describe an effective program for governance.¹ That is beyond their scope. Governance without any stability and continuity is not worthy of the name gov-

¹ Noise is, perhaps, best related to the governance programs of anarchy, though not directly so. The hospitality to noise and the ethics of coexistence advocated above, however, would seem to have a place within a politics of anarchy. This would be governance with noise, governance that
ernance. Instead, thorybology and noise politics seek to blur the distinction between art and life, to unmask the potential for divergence lurking within even the most rigid codes and schemas — a potential that can only ever be dampened but not extinguished by convention — to discover new means leading to unforeseen ends, opening the doors to other worlds than these. This unpredictability requires a subtler and less literal form of noise (i.e., one that takes the form of noise) where the interplay of noise and signal persist alike. Aspects of political unpredictability for noise include: announcing the void, voicing insufficiency, refusing recuperation — the important thing in thorybology is to not stop questioning; curiosity has its own reason for existing.

To go forward with noise, what we require is silence and a deep understanding of the environment. Thorybology maintains a research position that is always experimental (unknown in advance) so that it might subvert tactics based in human-centeredness. No doubt there is a threshold in all matters that must be kept in mind. Thorybology proposes a style of consciousness marked by an emphasis on din and by a re-entry into the rich fringes of sensation. What is vital to our consciousness is that we connect to noises and how we make those connections. Cage suggests a lucid scheme: if we try to disregard noises, they agitate us; but if we listen to them and recognize them, they may permit us to inhabit the world. Noise here crosses into sense — the signal, or at least the strategy of it as it relates to noise, retains a capacity for noise — jumps, cuts, gaps, alterations all allow this, hence the continued vibrancy of those strategies.

Turning a deaf ear to the violence of the world will not silence it. The only way to address violence is by facing it, acknowledging it. States and societies (as they are currently constructed) are marred by violence at the most basic and was open to change and adaptation, not governance in a constant state of change and disruption — an important caveat.
foundational of levels. In order to acknowledge the violence of the world, one must seek to radically restructure society, states, and our coexistence with/on the planet. Where there is a history of organization, introduce disorder. Where there is a history of disorganization, introduce order. Every encounter is a gamble. If the situation is hopeless, we have nothing to worry about. We had to conceive of silence in order to open our ears. We need to conceive of anarchy to be able wholeheartedly to do whatever another tells us to. To bring the play of intelligent anarchy into a world environment, we must encourage chance and indeterminacy, with a view toward liberating life from fixed structures of control. Thus, we are called not to imitate Cage’s actions, but to extend this process into new complex situations, to force connections between the process diagrammed in this text and new contexts.

The world is a moving target to be tracked experimentally in practice, not pinned beneath knowledge in thought. At the crossroads of both the politics of noise and silence, where the outcomes are unforeseen, there is a chance that they could feed forward into something greater — and a chance they might not. Without experimentation, without the production of zones of indeterminacy, however, you are only likely to end up with more of the same. The event exceeds intention, it gathers together the potentials inherent in a specific material situation, implicates and complicates them in another, and individualizes subjects and objects through its unfolding. In other words, the cacophony is not silent and must not be silenced.