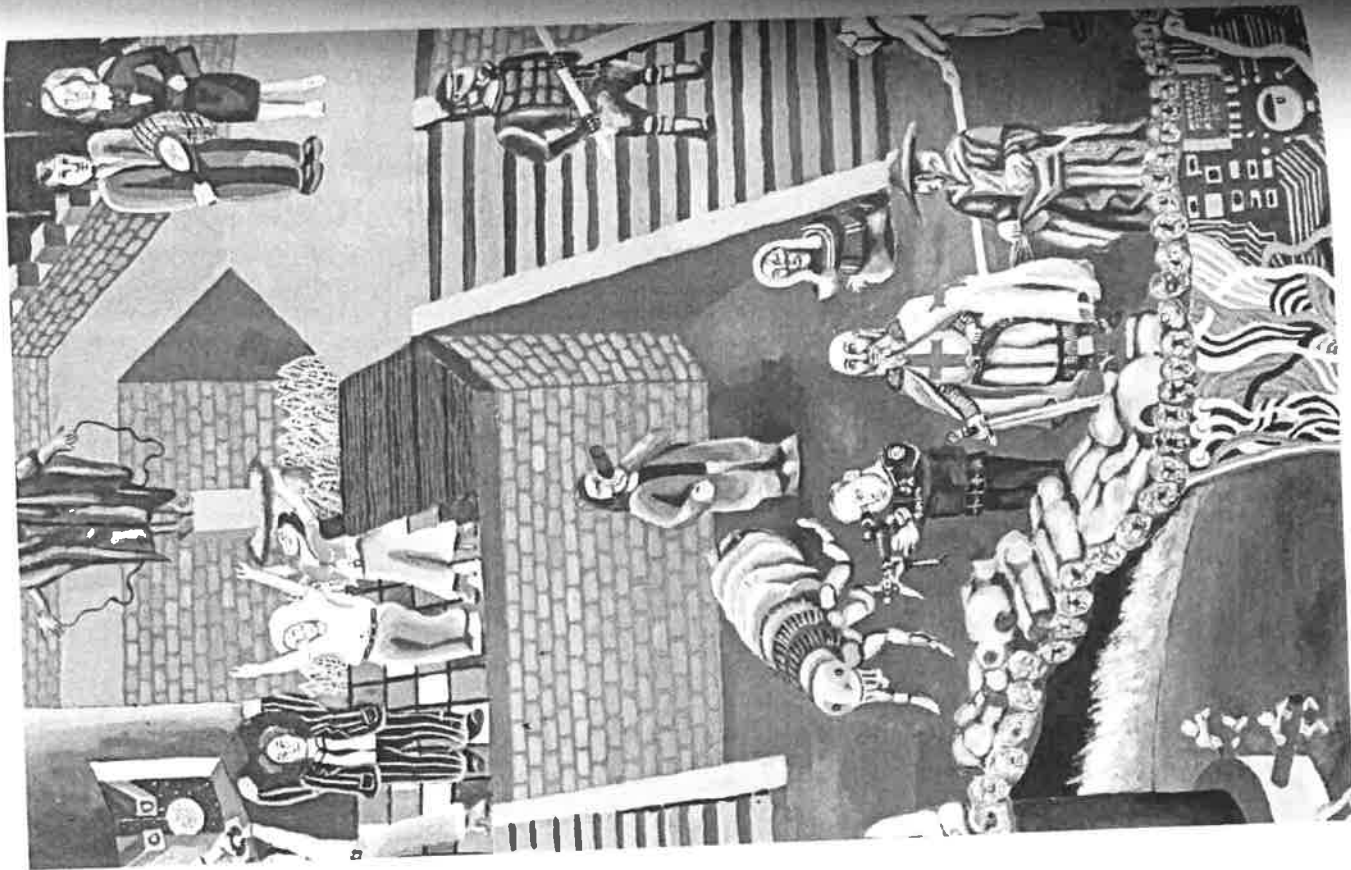


Max Rynnänen

Theory as Noise



1964/1967/1968

Ultimate noise is silence, claimed the young loudmouth Timothy Leary in his *Psychedelic Experience*. The book was published 1964, way before the mainstream hippie wave adopted Buddhism, repackaged it, and made it a quintessential ingredient for the trashy popular culture of the late 1960s.

Still, *Psychedelic Experience* already marks the end of Leary's academic career. During the making of the book he and his tribe – including Richard Alpert who then changed his name to Baba Ram Dass – were kicked out from Harvard. The scholarly revolution of psychology was transferred into a revolt of the outlaws. A laboratory was set up in Zihautanejo Mexico.

Psychedelic Experience itself is, to paraphrase Leary, silent only as ultimate noise. There is such an overflow of excess of structures and boundaries that it, in the end, produces a form of silence of endless noise – and one just has to let go, one just has to float with the strong, enormous stream of thought.

The book could be called a crossover, but that would be misleading. The upbeat mixing of experiential peaks from arts, sciences and religious texts, spiced up with quotes from the *Bardo Thodol* (The Tibetan Book of the Dead), hammer down all imaginable conventions of producing knowledge, writing about experience and theorizing about man and his/her culture.

Maybe following its wild nature the book was never destroyed by popular cultural history or normative scholarly readings that would have taken away its edgy aura. Never have I seen an academic hipster raise his/her voice in a seminar, and saying, "but in Timothy Leary's..." That would be a career disaster. Leary is *out*.

Maybe Leary understood that it was not enough to blow up a track leading theoretically to new unforeseen territories of thinking. It was as important to write the book in a way that could not be digested into the mass-impotence of academic philosophical scholarship.

The book is a pamphlet, a manifesto. It celebrates ecstatic experiences. Manifestos are often misleadingly explained to be expressions and proclamations of a vision. But Leary was interested in anything that forced the mind out from the box and the box out of the mind, experiences that pushed the mindset on the move. These experiences could, according to Leary, reprogram our personality and psychic machinery in depth. And the book was not just about expressing the vision, but to distribute the virus.

LSD is, of course, following its sensational value for the alcohol consumers of the white middle class, the most famous example of Leary's methods of ecstasy, of climbing out of the static (stasis), but Leary's work was never just about drugs. In *Psychedelic Experience* he discusses experiences of art and meditation.

The aim of the book is to force the reader onto the move, feeding movement, change, reprogramming (of the mind) and, in the end, working for a revolution of the personality, revolution of the society, and so, who knows, maybe even a revolution on a cosmic level – whatever that means (they are already collecting a group to leave this earth for Mars).

Psychedelic Experience is not just a trip-advisor and a manifesto. It is in itself a psychedelic agent. And it is a theoretical attempt to re-tune the instrument called human being.

Theory and practice worked hand-in-hand. After moving back to New York, Leary sent his missionaries around the world, carrying suitcases loaded with acid. Arriving to London one of the missionaries tried to make his way to the upper circles, so that the effects of the change would be felt in all parts of the society (this is somehow opposite to Marx's idea of the intellectual (himself) from the upper class descending down to free the minds of the workers).

Revolution is the reason why Leary had to write it all out loud. He is not poetic in the sense pointing to enjoyable text (jouissance). He is intense, febrile and surprising. The reader can forget analysis and stale contemplation, and s/he can forget inforainment. *Psychedelic Experience* is about pushing, really pushing thinking to the other side – taking us out from the Matrix – and not about showing "how this is possible", or grounding, it e-pis-te-mo-lo-gi-ca-ly.

I felt the kick when I found a dusty copy of the book in an antiquarian bookshop in the mid-90s. The text you are now reading is just one of its countless echoes / flashbacks.

1848/1994

Path-breakers have always searched for new ways of writing. This has not only been about seducing readers to adopt the stance of the author. Nor has it been just about making a difference. It is neither about doing something new (art is nearly never about this, but art historians seem to be stuck on this perspective).

Here is the key to understand our phenomenon: How can one break norms and expectations if one uncritically and without practical reflection / experimentation just works in the formal framework created side by side with them?

This is, I suppose, why Karl Marx marinated the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) with poetic ecstrophy. I say marinated, and not spiced up, because we are here not just talking about a finishing touch, but the essential nature of the text. The *Communist Manifesto* was not argumentative, nor really essayistic. It was a heatwave from brain to brain, a theoretical spark for the masses to raise flames, and a trip advisor – like Leary's book – for societal change.

The masses were – in Marx's mind – waiting for someone showing the way. Well, here he was wrong. The position of the proletarian class was easy to understand from the inside without a middle class man walking in and explaining it. (This has been shown by Jacques Ranciere and

his studies of the letters of 19th century workers.) The masses just needed fuel – and sparks. And they got it!

Poor Marx was, though, really lost. If the proletariat was truly laden with revolutionary knowledge about the injustices of the politico-economical system (master / slave) and so potentials for change, why did they need the middle class philosopher to come to help them? Marx was even so lost that he often sadly tried to play the role of a scholar, spicing up his text with argumentation and reasoning, to become heard not just 'down in the drain', but in the upper class world where he roamed. Sometimes his writings are just academic hoax. Simple topics become pseudo-science, explanations on explanations and a lot of footnotes.

The only wise thing Marx really did was to write some of his texts out loud. This breaking of patterns, hot and raunchy revolting, sent a virus out to the world enslaved by capitalists, not the man's B-class argumentation.

The same reason pushed bell hooks – who has been witty enough to even write her name without capital letters, so making a visible difference – to work out her *Outlaw Culture* (1994) in 'street talk'.

Some of Pasolini's (Petrolio) and Foucault's heretic writings, Derrida the trickster (as Michael Taussig calls him, recalling the role of the trickster in mythology) and Helene Cixous's forever expanding textual yin-dough are about the same urge to *do things* with the text.

Marx is often quoted saying that the role of philosophy is to change the world, but the true news is that it happens in his work only through noisy writings, a form of writing that breaks new paths and reforms thinking, and not at all through his scholastic system building, which fined the visual, philosophical and psychological order of the world that was (and still stays) detached from the infra-structure. Sometimes Marx might have been inspirational with his thinking about e.g. commodity fetishism, but to be honest, in them you find nothing to build on, if you don't happen to be just interested in theory. But his (poetic) noise...

Noise has to be witty, intellectual and bright, and it cannot be elevated with the help of a 'ground' – as there cannot be any real ground for thinking (as Nietzsche taught us). As morals do not have a foundation (outside of culture), the same applies to Marxism.

This is why we have to stand out from the witch-circle of writing as philosophical surgery, and to put the cold knife away.

1968/2015

It is always a mistake to read classics as 'classics'. Reading Deleuze one should note that his text "shits and fucks" (first page in *Anti-Oedipus*). Like historical avant-garde (dada, surrealism, constructivism, futurism), path-breakers of philosophical thinking have later on become

institutionalized in a way that lead us astray from their potentials. In an endless row of thinkers in the academic hall of fame Deleuze is a rational being, far from the animal, the machine and the revolutionary he was, from the mistakes he made, and from the revolution-fueling strength his texts are laden with. What once was an outcry of perennial philosophy written in the modern era is now a piece of a puzzle called the history of philosophy, where one can label anyone in connection to other classics, e.g. being for or against Kant's view, following Hegel, distancing himself from Heidegger. (The destiny of a classic of philosophy is not much better than the destiny of a painting that in the end hangs on the wall in Louvre, with no connection to its original flourishing context, but with labels telling you the century and the place where the painting was done.)

Michel Foucault's and Peter Sloterdijk's texts are more than theoretical analyses. They are booming a change, beginning with the explosion of the mindsets of the readers.

The Academic is not even a work the so called classic could refer to as his/her identity. Kierkegaard called himself a Fireman. Adorno took up the role of an exaggerating essayist, a writer so to speak, to wake people up. The boundary-breaking French rude and rogue wave of 20th Century thinking (Bataille, Blanchot, etc.) broke totally out to the literary sphere, at the same time as the thinkers of this loser community became Publishers, giving out their own journals and books.

And philosophical noise is a way old and very rich tradition.

Earsplitting was the scream of Jesus when he destroyed the tables at the kitsch market in Jerusalem and hombastic was the collective that raised the roof in Wittenberg. Cocky was the poetic strength of Rabelais, Villon, Rimbaud, Wilde and Ginsberg – and likewise, disturbing was the life work of Socrates, Diogenes, Diotima, Seneca, Hypatia, itchy freaks like Descartes and Baraille, and the rogue raging crescendos of Virilio, the psycho-tripping of Kristeva (on Giotto or pregnancy) and Mario Perniola, who's post-situationist chaos opens unforeseen windows to new realities.

Where would we be without theoretical, philosophical and sociological outcries, noise and its echoes, the screamers, the shouters – and the ballbreakers? (And shouting is not enough. It needs to be glued to a philosophical strain of thought, to not just be populist or black-and-white, and this is the true challenge for philosophy).

In a world where a collective sordino weakens all true political talk – in today's Finland the media has the guts to publicly call even hardcore Nazis and racists just 'critics of immigration' (not forgetting that one can be the latter without the former) – we need to raise the roof and to study theory as noise, maybe more than ever. It is not enough to analyze the lies of the extreme right wing, and to be honest I am not sure how far you get with that – as the extreme right is a little dependent on argumentation as the left. (Experiences divide in politics more than systematic thinking.) Where are the Marxes of our time when the ghost of fascism roams again in Europe? Where are the authors and writers of philosophical inquiry who would not just show

the way, but who would warm it up, and estrange it, so that we could see better, and not just see, but do the right thing?

Gert Raeithel

Karl Marx, Maledictor