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Eco's essay on censorship covers a broad range of subjects from many different time periods. He discusses its older forms, such as the fascist "velina", a direct form of censorship, before expanding on a different velina used in the modern day, or at least what was modern in 2009. Given that it has been over a decade since this essay was written, I think it has aged remarkably well, with its main points still remaining true. However, I think the way it manifests in the internet, in contemporary discourse, and how prevalent it is in the lives of most people today has drastically evolved.

In his essay, Eco addresses how noise relates to the internet and other media we consume, but with the benefit of hindsight it is easier for current audiences to interpret just how widespread the phenomenon he describes has become 14 years later. When discussing the internet, Eco states that it "generates, with no intention to censor, the greatest noise that yields no information" (pg. 3), which I believe is still mostly true. However, I think social media in particular has the incentive to maximize the production of noise, therefore perpetuating the modern velina Eco describes. Social media needs a lot of posts and activity to incentivize its users to continue using the service, so algorithms exploit human psychology to generate engagement. Algorithms can make posts difficult to ignore by playing on human emotions, which might be fine if the reaction is something like "that's a funny Rick Astley meme". But anger is one of the strongest emotions, encouraging people to like, comment, and share media, especially about important and controversial issues. This reflects something else Eco discusses in his lecture, the "deliberate censorship – this is what is happening in the world of television, in creating political scandals... excess of information is transformed into noise" (pg. 4). Political scandals are intended to create similar emotional reactions across the population, revealing a shared interest. This is how social media, other forms of media, and political discussion came to intersect, working co-dependently to create more dramatic reactions to generate more revenue, spread political messages, and create a lot of distractions for the general public. The unintended noise of the Internet and the intentional noise of television described by Eco is exacerbated, making an increasingly toxic and noisy climate, from which little practical information or value can be extracted.

Much of the noise Eco describes is used by organizations to influence the public, but he also gives examples of how creating noise can influence an individual. One such example is of a lady he met trying to create doubt and suspicion in a wealthy businessman's mind, revealing how literary techniques can be used to make noise. One such technique that is popular in modern discourse is "Whataboutism", a debate tactic used to shift the topic of a discussion. This may seem like a flawed strategy, since the argument is ultimately fallacious and leaves the previous point of contention uncontested, but changing the goal of the debate comes with its advantages. The initial accusation is rendered irrelevant, since whataboutism statements are often designed to be difficult to ignore, forcing the other person to engage with it, rather than the previous subject. A very well-known and controversial example of this concerns the 2016 presidential election. Donald Trump was, of course, a contentious candidate with a history of legal allegations. However, his political opponent, Hilary Clinton, was also no stranger to political scandals herself. By employing whataboutism, an individual trying to defend, for example, Donald Trump in a debate could say, "What about Hilary Clinton's emails?" or mention Whitewater scandal, distracting from the initial topic of the discussion. In theory, debate can be used as a tool in discussion to try and develop the opinions of the individuals involved about a specific subject. But with sufficient noise, the opposite can be achieved, with both individuals remaining adamantly convinced of their initial opinions, effectively censoring any dissenting opinions.

This shift in how censorship is employed mostly reinforces Eco's ideas, but given the current sociopolitical climate, I have some doubts about his conclusion in particular. Conceptually, it is still very much sound. It is important to step away from the noise and reflect on silence. Debates are an exemplary demonstration of this, as evidenced by the toxic environment perpetuated by social media and frustrating tactics like whataboutism. From personal and anecdotal experience, engaging in debates like these, which can often devolve into nonsensical ad hominem attacks, is not beneficial or healthy for anyone involved. Instead, searching for and contemplating new information for oneself, by oneself is a more effective way to expand one's scope of knowledge. But realistically, I cannot see Eco's suggestions making changes on a broader scale, given how wide the scope of the issue is now. Many important issues have become so intrinsically tied to the noise they generate that an individual's options are to ignore the issue entirely or engage with the noise on some level. This may be a biased perspective as a younger individual, but I believe there can be no real return to silence. The issues that generate the most noise are ones that can be resolved. Even the systems that can produce this noise can be reformed; for example, social media sites and news networks have economic incentives to create noise, which can be affected by legislation. But this requires engaging with noise, and advocating for better solutions than a perpetual cycle of distractions. Silence is incredibly beneficial, and an ideal worth striving for on a personal level. But I think his proposition is too idealistic to effectively implement for many people.

Returning to toxic discourse, the word “censorship” itself has been affected by noise. The way it is thrown around casually muddies its definition while still invoking fascist and *1984*-esque imagery. It inherently carries a negative connotation making it an effective insult and little more. This makes it refreshing to see Eco’s take on modern censorship, not as an all-powerful tool used to crush any dissension or a meaningless argument in a fruitless debate, but as a distraction used to more subtly affect the general public.