

Introduction: What is Intellectual Freedom Today? A Provocation

Mike Grimshaw and Cindy Zeiher

Why is it that a new journal that proclaims itself to be ‘a journal of intellectual freedom’ should undertake, as its initial issue, to ask ‘what is intellectual freedom today?’ How might this proclamation immediately be undercut by such a provocative question?

Contributors to this issue have responded in a variety of reflective and theoretical ways: One answer could be that of dialectic, in that deliberations of freedom inevitably fail in any actuality and this leaves open the possibility for new readings of intellectual freedom. Another response rests in a hermeneutic turn that such a provocation needs to be carefully examined through a series of points for explication and argumentation around specific terms which set up the problem of freedom in the first place. A third could be the analysis of power and privilege contained in the question, expressed in the desire *for* intellectual freedom, a freedom which is arguably not within one’s grasp under capitalism. More so, a formalisation of ‘weak thought’ is pursued, of a question asked that is always provisional and never closed: a question undertaken from hermeneutics that proceeds as appeals and announcements. Possibly an emerging response could also be that of asking is not intellectual freedom the kernel for deconstruction: to undercut that which is taken to exist, to signify and force new readings? There is also the ontology of the intellectual herself, whereby the ‘what’ is both preceded and followed by ‘who’; giving rise to discursive, situated and deliberate claims which demand close attention. Further, might the teleology of the identity and role named and claimed as

‘intellectual’ — and their claim of and for freedom — be a problematic and contentious site of political ideologies and current economic crisis to situate such a deliberation? Given these contexts, what is the role of the university in late modern neo-capitalism and how might be intellectual freedom then become a vanishing point or spectre from which desire for knowledge might emanate? The question of locality, the construction and problem of situating ‘knowledge’ and postcolonialism is also deliberated upon.

The claim of the need for intellectual freedom in world of the academic precariat is an underlying tension across all contributions. And so the potentiality of responses could go on, like a manifesto of and for this spectre, this claim, this opiate perhaps, of ‘intellectual freedom.’ And yet, as the number of respondents situated in a variety of fields, demonstrates there is something, a multiplicity of ‘somethings’, that we feel need to be attempted to be articulated, critiqued, argued and advanced as to the question ‘what is intellectual freedom today?’

More so, the precise way the question can be responded to, the manners in which it can be engaged with is itself a central question of *freedom* for the intellectual, of freedom *as to how to undertake the practice* of the intellectual. The provocation also occurs from within sets of conditions, a particular time and place of how this is constituted culturally, politically and intellectually. This journal, this issue, and more so this provocation purports to be a truly global undertaking, arising, or should we say hosted, from a small provincial university in the deep south Pacific, in a country where neo-liberalism was introduced in a form of ideological revolution by a Labour (that is, a claim to be left-wing social democratic) government in 1984 — and continued, unchecked by governments and largely, institutions, both left and right, ever since. It arises from small departments in a university where there is no space in the current philosophy department for continental thought and where the freedom to intellectually pursue continental thought occurs *everywhere but* within philosophy. Yet, it also occurs in the space left open to ‘be intellectuals’, to pursue deliberations of ‘intellectual freedom’ — *if one so wishes to*; that is ‘intellectual freedom’ as a framed event undertaken by individual choice, rather than a provocation from the demand of the academy. Herein lies a crucial tension from which this provocation is pivoted and that prompted us to think variously as to the ‘what’ of the claim, the ‘what is’ of the event, the context of the claim and the action, the situation of the critique and the all-too often and overly familiar lament of intellectual freedom’s limitation, endangerment and function.

We also wanted to give our contributors freedom as to how they may wish to

respond. So we sought brief opinion pieces that allowed a direct engagement (manifesto pieces if you like), as well as longer, (some much longer) more theoretical deliberations of various lengths. A multiplicity of views, voices and approaches was what we sought - and received. Intellectual freedom also involves the praxis of one's discipline and the freedom to respond to a question from within that praxis as one deems fit and this means also that we recognize that the referencing styles are inconsistent, but part of intellectual freedom is allowing writers to reference as they wish. As will be evident, some contributors have taken this path and we welcome the circulation and deliberation of these pieces and of course all the others; hopefully each is able to act as its own provocation for further engagements and debates.

This inaugural issue of CT&T ponders *what is* 'the what' of intellectual freedom in the present? Perhaps it is indeed a provocation, the claim of provocation, the desire for provocation, the hermeneutics of provocation — and the multiplicity in a context all too consumed with the order of singularity.