

On Freedom of Thought

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The social implementation of neoliberalism has led to a systematic removal of critical, dialectical and speculative thinking from the majority of academic and scientific institutions. As the predominating dogma goes, to think in a scientific way means to carry out applicable research; interdisciplinarity has become the main buzzword, which is accompanied by a watered down conception of scientificity. In the end, this conception combines a more or less superficial empiricist reductionism with a highly problematic fetishisation of technology. Interdisciplinarity does not stand for any challenging orientation of research, but rather for a peculiar euthanasia of thinking through the imposition of commodity form and through research management, whose main task is to transform scientific research activity and institutions into some kind of start-up companies — this is the main tendency of Lacan's 'university discourse' today.

We know that science is anything but a neutral field, floating above our banal capitalist reality; it is rather a conflictual field, where political confrontation is constantly at stake, something like a generalised 'class-struggle in theory' as formulated by Althusser. The endeavour for a dialectical and materialist conception of science, against the predominant technicist and empiricist epistemologies, is merely one expression of such 'class-struggle', where the endeavour for detaching scientific research from the imperatives of the market in fact leads to a broader confrontation concerning the conception of political subjectivity, the nature of thinking and the critical role of science.

The autonomy of theory is today more than ever considered a scandal and a luxury. For this reason the struggle for a critical conception of scientificity, which does not subscribe to the instrumentalization of research and consequently of thinking as such, is all the more necessary. Our contemporary

advocates of interdisciplinarity often openly impose the idea that scientificity necessitates a rejection of critical, speculative and dialectical orientation of thinking, replacing it with its 'realistic' and 'sound' opposite: the technicist, instrumentalist and reductionist thinking. With this "realistic regression", the central feature of thinking is excluded: *alienation*, which has been preoccupying philosophical thought throughout modernity and which has been most systematically theorised in Hegel's philosophical system, Marx's critique of political economy and Freud's psychoanalysis (to name only the prominent ones, in the shadow of which we will hopefully remain for a while longer). What unites these thinkers is the — for our ideological times — outrageous idea that, to think 'freely' in the last instance comes down to exposing oneself to negativity, decentralisation, contradiction... in thinking. What is Hegel's dialectics other than the movement of thinking *qua* contradiction, which produces a series of critical consequences? What is Marx's critique of fetishism other than the kick off of a materialist insight into the repressed truth of social mechanisms? And finally, what is Freud's psychoanalytic method other than the royal path to the discovery of constitutively decentralised nature of thinking?

Based on these three examples one can argue that the freedom of thinking consists precisely in the possibility and the right to think *inadequately*, against the superficial and false 'realism of facts' or appearances. Thinking is most free when it encounters its own cracks, slips and breakdowns, which means as much as experiencing the inadequacy of both thinking and the fetishised facticity with themselves. Hence, to think means in the first place to think against the discourse of facts, or to put it in yet another way, thinking encloses the possibility of error. In the end, did not all major philosophical breakthroughs and scientific revolutions always consist in the confrontation with an apparently insurmountable obstacle, which gave rise to a series of failed and erroneous attempts of its overcoming? Haven't they confronted the inconsistency of reality, which has always been consequently accompanied by or reflected in a contradiction of thinking? No surprise, then, that Lacan took seriously Freud's minimalist epistemological suggestion, according to which the revolutionary sequence of modern science got complete only with the invention of psychoanalysis: with a systematic theorisation of the decentralised nature of thinking under the concept of the unconscious. There is no psychoanalysis without the preceding revolution in physics and biology – but there is strictly speaking no scientific revolution without its extended repetition in the field of sciences, which treat of human objects: language, knowledge, subjectivity.

A critical epistemology would insist that error expresses nothing other than the immanent split of thinking, its inconsistent and conflictual character that was brought to the point in psychoanalysis. One could say that the

concept of the unconscious is an adequate theoretical representation of the inadequacy of thinking. And it is this inadequacy (rather than in some fictitious neutral observer, subject of cognition or start-up entrepreneur, this modern day *homo oeconomicus*) that operates as the negative foundation of scientificity, a foundation that, by confronting thinking with its own inconsistency, throws thinking out of joint. This does not mean that one should be apologetic toward every systematised delirium, but rather that thinking reclaims its right of exaggeration of facticity. Thought is an amplifier, which, by exaggerating appearances, breaks the restrictive ideological regime of the factual. The right to challenge the frames of possible (another way to describe intellectual freedom) means to encounter, in the order of things, a point where reality turns out to be inconsistent and disfunctioning. Thought fully exercises its immanent freedom by mobilising this inadequacy in order to bring about transformative effects. That is indeed thinking with consequences: critique, dialectics, speculation - which, again, are all conditioned by the possibility of error as their main driving force. The symptomatic truth addressed by this form of thinking could be defined with a minimal correction of the classic doctrine: *inadequatio rei et intellectus*. Where there is inadequate relation, non-relation, there thinking encounters its own freedom. The enigmatic philosophical name for this freedom is nothing other than alienation.