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ROGUE VIEWPOINTS OR MORE…?
The Idea of Academic Freedom Today

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This paper, envisioned as a starting point for a discussion, addresses the issue of academic freedom in the contemporary neoliberal context that has entered every aspect of our lives. Referring to the historical-social, political, and institutional origins that enabled the (re)definition of the ideal of academic freedom, the authors examine various contemporary processes – from adaptations to the labor market to quality control and verification of the "usefulness of knowledge" – raising questions about the possibility of "rogue viewpoints" (Butler 2009). This entails questioning not only what is presented as legitimate in the context of academic freedom today, but also the very boundaries that allow any questioning and critique, as well as the possibility of alternative imaginaries for the future of universities.

Keywords: academic freedom, precarity, rogue viewpoint, critical thinking, autonomy of academic institutions

In February 2024, Ghassan Hage's employment contract with the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology was terminated on account of his criticism of the Israeli government on social media (posts on Facebook and Twitter). Some of his critical comments regarding the suffering of Palestinians were reported by the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag*, which published an article accusing Hage of antisemitism and incitement to hatred. Shortly after the publication of this article, the decision to terminate Hage's contract was made, and the Max Planck Society released a statement justifying this action: "The fundamental right to freedom of opinion is constrained by the mutual duties of consideration and loyalty in the employment relationship. Racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, discrimination, hatred, and agitation have no place in the Max Planck Society."[1] The termination of Hage's contract is just one example from recent years where expressing critical opinions leads to institutional sanctions.[2] Hage's dismissal provoked numerous reactions: from many

1 https://www.mpg.de/21510445/statement-ghassan-hage (accessed 20 April 2024).

2 The 2024 Academic Freedom Index (AFI) report identifies the decline in academic freedoms as part of the broader societal and political polarization, noting that this trend has become increasingly pronounced since 2006. This decline is often linked to the challenges faced by critical thinking within academic institutions, which are supposed to protect it. The Academic Freedom Index (AFI) is published in collaboration with the Institute of Political Sciences at the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen–Nuremberg, in partnership with the V-DEM Institute, Scholars at Risk Network, and the Global Public Policy Institute, https://academic-freedom-index.net/#top (accessed 19 April 2024).

individual expressions of solidarity to anthropological associations from across the world, from the US and Australia to Europe and Germany, voicing their concerns. Jewish intellectuals, as well as civil society organizations from different parts of the world, expressed their support and organized petitions, calling for the protection of academic freedom and reminding academic institutions of their obligation to provide their employees and students with a "safe space" for the exchange of ideas, open discussion, and autonomous research. They stressed that the safety of such space and the autonomy of academic freedoms represent the fundamentals of independent critical thought within research and educational institutions. As a prerequisite of such safety, the safety of scholarly work, the autonomy puts before academic institutions a responsibility, which, in the face of polarizing social and political circumstances, as well as economic pressures, is seen as a burden contributing to compromising institutional independence, the erosion of academic freedoms, and, ultimately, increased insecurity (precarity) for academic workers.

The case of a scholar – in this instance, an anthropologist who has dedicated his career to studying racism, colonial violence, nationalism, and the possibility of critical thinking today[3] – being dismissed on account of his critical statements about Israelis is just one in a series of severe attacks on intellectuals that have taken place around the world over the past few decades.[4] Although such attacks on intellectuals in Germany are often justified by specific local regulations, similar attacks occur in other nations as well. Controversies arise not only from opinions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also from other topics, particularly those related to issues of race, sexuality, and gender, popularly referred to as "identity politics," which have led to "culture wars" and "cancel culture." The entry of "cancel culture" into the academic context has resulted in the conflation of the neoliberal idea of "freedom of speech" with the concept of "academic freedom" (Scott 2019). Alongside other processes linked to neoliberalization, precarization, and the restructuring of academic institutions, this conflation has far-reaching consequences, only partially visible in cases such as the termination of Hage's contract for expressing a critical opinion that was interpreted as "disloyalty to the institution," "abuse of freedom of speech," and

3 Ghassan Hage is a professor of socio-cultural anthropology at the University of Melbourne (Future Generation Professor) and a member of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. He has worked as a visiting professor at various prestigious institutions worldwide, including Harvard University, the University of Amsterdam, the University of Copenhagen, and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. Hage was a visiting professor/researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology from early 2023 until February 2024. His most significant works include: *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (1998, 2000), *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (2003), *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropological Thought and the Radical Imagination* (2015), *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?* (2017, 2018). He has received several awards for his work.

4 In Germany, similar controversies have arisen due to statements about Israel, such as the attacks on Masha Gessen, the postponement of the award presentation to Palestinian writer Adania Shibli at the Frankfurt Book Fair, and perhaps one of the most radical examples – the request by the Commissioner for Jewish Life to ban Cameroonian theorist Achille Mbembe from opening the festival in Bochum in 2020 due to his critical stance on Israel's treatment of the Palestinian issue. The most recent example from April 2024 includes banning the professor from the University of Athens and political activist Yanis Varoufakis, as well as Ghassan Abu-Sittah, the Rector of the University of Glasgow, from speaking at any events in Germany (including video conferences) related to Gaza and the Palestinian issue, all for the "purpose of protecting the security of the State of Israel."

"promoting racist views." Such cases are symptomatic of the present day when various pressures and unilateral *ad hoc* decisions gradually reshape the boundaries of academic freedom, redefine the limits of (un)acceptable academic thought, and redirect the ideals of the common good towards political-economic spheres of loyalty and the limitations of employment obligations.

The goal of this discussion is to critically examine the issue of academic freedom within the contemporary neoliberal context, marked by a social atmosphere of uncertainty (precarity) in which this issue arises. This atmosphere, among other things, not only allows for the relativization of the concept of academic freedom but also has far-reaching consequences concerning democracy and the common good. It is important to say that we approach the social atmosphere in the sense put forward by Raymond Williams and Lauren Berlant, as a "structure of feeling" or "historical present" that enables the shared experience of a particular feeling of life expressed in multiple ways relating to the "accrued lived experience of time," "culture of the time," something that is partially inherited from the past, but continuously reshaped, that acquires new meanings and is felt differently (Williams 2006: 41; Berlant 2011: 4). Our primary questions concern the contemporary social atmosphere that reshapes the ideal of academic freedom and foregrounds concepts such as the "usefulness of knowledge," the "ambivalence of knowledge," the "legitimacy of knowledge," and, most importantly, the "rogue viewpoint," which, according to Judith Butler, although not explicitly, emerges from the idea of academic freedom. The rogue viewpoint involves questioning what is presented as legitimate, but it "is not one that can be spoken without doing some damage to the idea of what is speakable…," i.e., it concerns the very boundaries that allow for questioning (2009: 777). By focusing on these boundaries, we ask: what does academic freedom mean today, what are the effects of neoliberalization on academic freedom, and how are these effects experienced both "within" and "outside" academic institutions? What ambivalences are embodied in the ideal of academic freedom, and how do they manifest in different contexts and times, taking on various forms? How do neoliberal practices change the ideal of academic freedom, undermine it, and shape it according to the needs of the market economy in late capitalism? How is academic freedom practically perforated, how does it navigate between imposed limitations, and how are its changing meanings articulated in the lives of scholars, academic institutions, and society at large? And finally, in what ways do these new limitations impact the position of the rogue viewpoint?

Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is defined as one of the tenets of modern academic institutions. There is a substantial body of literature on the topic, with much of it focusing on the legal aspects as well as the particularities of different legal frameworks and their

changes depending on historical and social contexts and the differences from one country to the next. The ideal of academic freedom has never been fixed in meaning; however, it is characterized by the fact that it has been shaped as a reflection of tensions and internal conflicts that emerge between the need to preserve autonomy and various external pressures that seek to undermine this autonomy. The balancing of these tendencies has taken place with varying dynamics, conditioned by the relationships between society, church, economy, government, and the students and professors themselves (Hearn 2003: 3). Despite the shifting power constellations that shaped the first universities, they positioned themselves as sites of radical social critique and as platforms for establishing the profession, both by serving external dominant interests and simultaneously opposing them in order to preserve their own autonomy. This tension between the usefulness of universities to society on the one hand and the freedom and independence of research on the other persisted even in the university reform movements of the 19th century (ibid.: 5).

Contemporary definitions of academic freedom are rooted in Humboldt's educational reform in Germany in the early 19th century, which gave rise to the idea of the humanistic university. This concept began with the scholars of German idealism (such as Kant, Fichte, Schleiermacher, etc.) and, according to Humboldt – who was also influenced by the founders of modern liberal thought and the Enlightenment – the university as an institution is crucial not only at the national level as a guardian of knowledge but also as a place where knowledge develops autonomously (Sorkin 1983: 62–66). The state should finance academic institutions, but they must not be subject to political power, nor should they vocationally educate students solely with the aim of meeting current economic interests. The primary task of the university is to create a community of those who are willing to learn in order to establish an academic space where new ideas are generated and critical thinking is fostered through the free interaction of all (students and scholars). In this way, the university becomes a "common good," and as an institution, it is important to the state because its goal is to educate "good citizens." If individuals are allowed to freely develop their capacities without reducing them to mere vocational training, they will inevitably become productive citizens – "good citizens" – who contribute to state prosperity and improve the state's position relative to other states.

According to Joan Scott, Humboldt's vision of academic freedom contains an inherent duality: on the one hand, the role of academic institutions is defined by the creation of knowledge that fosters the formation of a unified national culture, which becomes a factor in international competition; on the other hand, academic institutions must serve as a safe place for critical thinking that is independent of power relations in society (2019: 97). This duality has characterized the understanding of academic freedom up to the present day, taking on different contours depending on the historical context within which it is interpreted. Although the Humboldtian university never fully materialized as he envisioned it,[5] it can be said that the definition

5 See Despot 1991.

of academic freedom based on humanistic principles has become a sort of ideal – an aspiration that does not reflect the existing state of affairs but guides action and enables not only academic debate but also the principles of democracy. Invoking such an understanding of academic freedom always occurs under conditions that indicate a violation of what is upheld as the ideal, which is the ongoing "game" of opposition (disagreement) and the development of critical thinking – a kind of academic creation of knowledge for the common good. This knowledge is subject to the self-regulating aspect of the academic collective, an aspect that is not disciplinarily confined and that, through the provision of a safe space for academic debate, ensures the well-being of society as a whole (Scott 2019).[6] Academic freedom, viewed in this way, fundamentally "preserves" all forms of knowledge (universality, general knowledge), including what Kant might refer to as so-called "useless knowledge" – i.e., forms of knowledge that, at the time of their creation, do not necessarily have to be translated into "useful" knowledge and skills.

The current emphasis on the immediate "translatability" of knowledge into practical applications and adaptation to the labor market is a product of the contemporary neoliberal restructuring of universities, where the "responsibility" of academic institutions is increasingly viewed in terms of solving the "real problems of today." This shift is evident in one of the most important global documents on higher education produced at the end of the 20th century: UNESCO's World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century, adopted in 1998.[7] In 2022, in line with this declaration, UNESCO organized a conference in Barcelona to discuss a new vision for the role of academic institutions, which are now expected to address specific contemporary issues (the usefulness of knowledge) and the vision of a sustainable future (economic development). The declaration highlights the responsibility of academic institutions and the entire academic community to address certain social problems for the benefit of all. However, as Scott notes, in various other documents that have followed and were created at national levels, which also relate to academic freedom, it is unclear who and how determines what constitutes the universal common good, how universal the application of academic freedom must be for it to be considered a valid practice, and in what context (2019: 13). This raises the question of academic freedom in societies where the foundations for its practice are lacking and in societies where material resources are distributed in a discriminatory manner. Additionally, how are the "real problems of today" identified? Can we still speak of academic freedom and the idea of a humanistic university when scholars and researchers, as is the case today, are being continuously regulated through the funding of only certain

6 See Butler 2009.

7 It is important to note that in 1988, 10 years prior to UNESCO's World Declaration, which marked the 900th anniversary of the founding of the University of Bologna, the "Magna Charta Universitatum" was created and initially signed by the rectors of 388 European academic institutions from various countries. This document not only emphasizes the mobility of both faculty and students in its final paragraph, but also repeats the humanistic tradition of universities. In 2020, a revised version of this document was created, which, while reiterating the general components of academic freedom, also emphasizes the global role of academic institutions and expands the scope of responsibilities that these institutions hold at the local level. To date, this document has been signed by more than 1,000 academic institutions. (https://www.magna-charta.org/).

research projects that address "real problems" and through the numerical evaluation of their work? Or, returning to the example from the beginning of this discussion, what happens when an academic institution cites the misuse of academic freedom as a reason to sanction a scholar without the possibility of academic debate? How have we come to the point where certain topics cannot be subject to critical thinking? What about the so-called "self-regulating aspect of the academic collective?" To partially answer these questions and to address the position of the rogue viewpoint today, it is essential to consider the neoliberal context within which one of the most important documents on higher education was drafted. This document has subsequently influenced a series of internal strategies and regulations that are adapted to both national and institutional levels.

Neoliberalism and the Neoliberalization of Universities

Neoliberalism today is typically associated with public policies that reduce the social role of the state, promote the deregulation of capital and labor, reduce progressive taxation, privatize public goods, and promote total market freedom, making it central to the regulation of all other social relations. According to David Harvey, even though neoliberal policies began in the 1970s with their implementation in Chile under the influence of the Chicago School of Economics, they actually originated as a program in 1947, when a group of scholars gathered around Friedrich von Hayek, an Austrian political philosopher, at Mont Pelerin in Switzerland (2007). Their program was a response to the policies of John Maynard Keynes, known for his idea of the liberal welfare state – a concept where the state is responsible for ensuring the well-being of all through various social policies, which were prevalent in Western countries following the economic crises of the 1930s. Hayek's group, advocating for private property, individual freedom, and market freedom, opposed all forms of state planning and remained on the fringes of any academic and political influence until the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan implemented neoliberal policies in their respective countries. These policies resulted in the privatization of state-owned businesses and the reduction of public support such as unemployment benefits, healthcare, and pensions. The freedom of the market and the individual was promoted, and the shift in the state's role regarding social equality and social policies – especially significant after World War II – was best illustrated by Margaret Thatcher's statement: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families" (1987). According to Thatcher, the state's duty is to ensure market freedom, enabling citizens to independently, by their own free choice, take care of themselves and their families. In this way, individuals become "free subjects who independently manage their lives," and thus, the responsibility for their "success" or "failure" is individual (Brown 2014, 2019). The losers of this ideology, which structurally generates them – minorities, the unemployed, women,

and migrants – are seen as responsible for the poor management of their own lives (Berlant 2011). The idea of personal freedom begins to merge with the idea of personal competitiveness, aiming for imagined prosperity as a possible and achievable goal for everyone, provided they "manage" their lives well.

In her book *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, Wendy Brown emphasizes that it is precisely this component, which includes individual freedom and market freedom, where neoliberalism extends far beyond mere economic restructuring of society (2019). This represents a political rationality that insists on individual freedom as the independence of those governed, independence from the state, and independence from others. The idea of individual freedom does not question the material and other conditions in which the individual finds themselves – quite the opposite, market freedom sets the "rules of the game" in which individual freedom is practiced, all aimed at unlimited economic progress, with the horizon being the entire planet. This can be described as planetary commercialization, producing the conditions that permit freedom, or the idea of "you are free to be free," meaning that subjects are made to feel free (Foucault 2016: 40). In these new circumstances, the market, as the regulating principle upon which society is based, requires the state – not as a controller of the market, but quite the opposite, the legitimacy of the state is tied to maintaining the market "whether through monetary and fiscal policy, immigration policy, the treatment of criminals, or the structure of public education" (Brown 2014). Brown stresses that such a conception of freedom has significant effects, naturalizing both self-exploitation and increasing economic inequality in society. It entirely deconstructs concepts such as social justice and the common good. Continuous "investment in oneself" is encouraged on all levels, both financially and socio-culturally, and given that market demands are constantly changing, flexibility and mobility are promoted, which leads to precarity as a sense of life insecurity that becomes a defining characteristic for the majority.[8] Everything becomes capital, subject to constant calculation and metrics aimed at maximizing profit, even in domains not directly monetized, such as universities (ibid.: 2015: 10).

The neoliberalization of universities first began in the UK and the US, and then spread further. Given that it involves processes through which various projects are realized, it takes on multiple forms. However, generally speaking, the market orientation of universities is being strengthened everywhere, and in some countries, the private sector plays a significant role not only in funding but also in university governance. One of the goals of university neoliberalization is the reduction of state expenditures, and in this context, staff efficiency becomes important. New terms such as "knowledge society" and "centers of excellence" are introduced. While these terms are not inherently good or bad, the way they become performative and the way they are implemented in practice aim to create an entrepreneurial culture. In other words, what characterizes the economic sector becomes the foundation for the pub-

8 On precarity, the question of freedom and neoliberal policies see Božić-Vrbančić 2023.

lic sector as well, including universities.[9] An audit culture is introduced, meaning quality control in higher education, which, in addition to internal quality evaluation mechanisms (self-evaluation), is also entrusted to independent external agencies.[10] The methods by which audit culture is implemented vary from one country to another, but the ultimate goal relies on evaluating various parameters for the purpose of continuous improvement of performance (exam success, the success of individual modules, program success, learning outcomes, teaching competencies, mobility of both faculty and students, etc., are evaluated). Faculty are further evaluated by the number of published papers, the publishers which publish the papers are also assessed, academic journals are categorized, public presentations, media appearances, participation in academic projects are counted, attention is paid to citation, i.e., the visibility of the work, presentations at scholarly conferences, invited lectures, networking, and membership in various academic societies worldwide. Shore and Wright call this neoliberal audit culture in universities an "index mania," or management by numbers, which results in the regulation of how academic research is conducted, how research topics are chosen, how curricula are designed, and ultimately, how relationships within the academic community itself are regulated, as well as relationships with students and teaching methods (2024). The questionable applicability of knowledge from the social sciences and humanities is perceived by the public sphere as an "unprofitable investment," both from the perspective of taxpayer money and from the perspective of interest in study programs.[11] In such a social atmosphere marked by competitiveness and applicability, "unprofitable" study programs are forced to offer almost embarrassing justifications for their so-called inefficiency toward management structures and broader public opinion. Neoliberal terminology has metastasized into the jargon and discourse within the academic community, putting the needs of the labor market in the foreground, raising questions about the rationale for the workforce we "produce," positioning itself through

9 For example, in the US, as Press and Washburn have pointed out, alongside the reduction of public funding and the influx of capital into university structures, research focuses have shifted, paving the way for the transformation of publicly accessible academic discoveries meant for the common good into commercially viable and patent-protected corporate products. In such circumstances, profitability has become an imperative that ultimately reshaped academic freedoms and necessitated the transformation of university autonomy, within which independent critical thinking ceased to exist (Press and Washburn 2000: 39–53).

10 For example, at the EU level, following the Bologna Declaration (1999), a series of regulations have been introduced to ensure an integrated European Higher Education Area with some comparable criteria. Academic institutions are expected to develop their internal quality assurance systems, and external evaluation reports are also conducted. The Republic of Croatia joined the Bologna Process in 2001, and the development of a quality assurance system began with the adoption of the Science and Higher Education Act in 2003. The Agency for Science and Higher Education, which conducts external evaluations of academic institutions, was founded in 2004. The system of evaluation and assessment is also regulated by various laws. For instance, the 2023 Wage Act introduced a new system for evaluating work efficiency, whereby university staff will be assessed annually by the heads of academic institutions (rectors and deans) according to the criteria prescribed by the Government, i.e., the relevant ministry. This not only diminishes the autonomy of universities, but also fosters an environment where academic staff are subjected to constant anxiety and concern for their job security (Obadić 2022).

11 For analysis of neoliberalization of academic institutions in Croatia see Žunec. 2010. For the analysis of the position of the humanities in the context of neoliberalization see Bagarić, Biti and Škokić, eds. 2017.

learning outcomes as a legally binding guarantee of acquired knowledge and skills as products, condensing study programs through compressed and accelerated processes of knowledge acquisition (micro-qualifications), putting an emphasis on skills desired in the labor market, and restructuring university policies and strategies. According to Wright and Shore, anthropologists have long warned of the effects of neoliberal quantification of life on the population because, whether it involves counting steps while walking in the park, collecting "likes" on social media, or counting academic papers to determine the status not only of academics but also of the institutions where they are employed, counting and classification self-regulate all activities and produce a social atmosphere in which individual and institutional achievement in meeting a certain "number" becomes the foundation of all evaluations.

> Audits do not simply or passively measure performance; they actively reshape the institutions into which they are introduced [...]. When a measurement becomes a target, institutional environments are restructured so that they focus their resources and activities primarily on what "counts" [...] rather than on their wider professional ethics and societal goals. (2017: 5)

Instead of generating academic knowledge for the common good, which, despite its limitations and disciplinary boundaries, is "self-regulated" through a safe space for academic debate (implying the concept, or rather the aspiration of academic freedom), there is now a new form of self-regulation through the attempt to meet the new "rules of the game" based on numbers. In such an environment, collaboration and interdisciplinary cooperation become desirable traits in project proposals, whose relevance and innovation are measured by levels of societal relevance, applicability, and compatibility with the economy. The values and principles of capitalism are reproduced through various strategies: strategic partnerships between the public sector and industry are formed, future employees are recruited through scholarships, certain positions and professor salaries depend on the private sector, which also finances and promotes the use of new technologies, encourages patent development, and fosters a culture of entrepreneurship through the transfer of technologies (Hearn 2003: 8–9). Collegiality within the academic community gives way to competitiveness: an atmosphere of competition, fear, and distrust is created; information is withheld, points are collected, and although the evaluation and assessment process is presented as a neutral procedure aimed at improving institutional performance, it is highly ideologized, and it regulates the actions of all actors. At the institutional level, audit culture increases pressure on institutions by creating so-called rankings of the best universities, including global, European, and regional lists. Academic stars are created to "brand" the university, attracting the attention of both the media and students and, in some countries, universities become corporate entities, increasing their profits through financial investments and entering into market competition. Students themselves are involved in evaluating both instruction faculty and other staff members, and at some universities, especially in the US, this often leads to antagonism and demands for changes in the curriculum, all through

the lens of individual freedoms to which students appeal. Academic freedom, which should ensure faculty's independence as well as the right to express criticism, is often equated with individual freedom, i.e., freedom of speech. According to Scott (2022), equating academic freedom with freedom of speech revises the historical foundation on which the idea of academic freedom is based, as academic freedom has always pertained to collective rights granted to academics. By reducing these rights to individual freedom, not only is the ideal of academic freedom and the possibility of critical thinking undermined, but so is the concept of the common good.

Equating Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech

Judith Butler (2009) argues that to fully understand today how the ideas of the common good and critical thinking were connected in the concept of academic freedom, it is important to revisit Immanuel Kant's notion of critique, which was pivotal for Humboldt and for the idea of academic freedom. Reading Kant through Derrida and Foucault, Butler claims that critical thinking is not confined to the university context but can also question the legitimacy of all institutions, including the state itself. Kant was primarily concerned with what constitutes the legitimacy of certain knowledge, and in seeking to answer this, he defined critical thinking as a set of questions – "in what way?" and "by what right?" – that pertain to the examination of the very process of legitimizing certain knowledge. Although Kant restricts critical thinking to philosophy as an academic discipline, Butler, following Derrida, expands the concept to encompass all academic disciplines. Paradoxically, in order to even pose critical questions, the state must guarantee the right to question, i.e., it must secure the right, which becomes the foundation for critiquing the state itself and ultimately confirming its legitimacy. If the state does not guarantee this right, it takes a dogmatic stance, proclaiming any alternative opinion as problematic. This principle applies equally to academic institutions, disciplinary inquiries, and the entire network of various governmental and non-governmental agencies, as well as other institutions. The questions "In what way?" and "By what right?" allow for the scrutiny of all positions, and regardless of the conclusions reached, they are inseparable from the right to disagree with existing explanations. Since critique is inseparable from disagreement, when such questions cannot be posed because the state controls the conditions for dissent – deeming certain critical views dangerous and seeking to protect certain forms of power from scrutiny – a position of rogue viewpoints emerges for those who raise them, leading to the discrediting of their perspectives. Thus, equating critical thinking based on academic freedom with freedom of speech not only challenges the ability to assess the legitimacy of a certain viewpoint but also marginalizes rogue viewpoints as undesirable and dangerous. This dynamic fosters a societal atmosphere in which antagonisms thrive, based on disagreements that are not the result of critical thinking but of feelings of moral righteousness, the idea of the "rational subject," and the "free subject" – an idea that neoliberalism has

conflated with "rational action" (Brown 2014). In such a social atmosphere, where the foundation of any individual argument is equated with critical thinking, conditions are created for the emergence of various conspiracy theories and pseudoscientific claims, whose effectiveness relies on their persuasiveness within a broader context of anti-intellectualism. As a result, the questioning of social issues under the protection of academic freedom shifts from a heuristic debate to a constrained and contentious discussion marked by pro and con positions. This polarization is further complicated in the digital environment, especially in the post-pandemic era, where the issue of academic freedom and critical thought is blurred in a gray area of legally unresolved dilemmas between private views and professional obligations, the preservation of the appeal of academic institutions, corporately regulated and shifting privacy frameworks, and the alluring strategies of social networks that promote the idea of free speech. According to Reichman, the relationship between diverse opinions in the public sphere and the safety of the space of academic freedom is extremely ambivalent. On the one hand, the potential for almost unlimited access to information carries the risk of relativizing critical thought amid a plethora of volatile views and polarized claims on social media, where "culprits" are identified through the logic of *argumentum ad hominem*.

The pressures on the academic community are exerted from various sources, including state institutions, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, the media, and individual actors. In recent years, we have witnessed "culture wars" and "cancel culture" on university campuses, where certain departments dealing with "controversial" topics such as race and gender have been shut down. Discussions are often reduced to "shallow presentism," where certain categories are essentialized and dehistoricized, and due to the "sensitivity" of certain subjects, even comparisons that could critically highlight the intersectionality between different phenomena are banned. In short, historicity is lost. And, as Theo David Goldberg succinctly puts it, the erasure of history is one of the key aspects of the neoliberalization of society, as what is being removed primarily concerns the historicity of conditions that created neoliberalization: "that effacing of that history itself has a history, and what gets lost […] is the transformation in categories, the work those categories have done in the past, that are both continuing to do but also paving new inroads into racist thinking" (Goldberg in Gilroy 2020). According to Goldberg, there are tendencies to simplify everything that happens into comparisons of certain conditions that have led to specific phenomena, which are then compared with conditions elsewhere, thereby losing the ability to understand the network of relationships between certain phenomena and their intersectionality. Critically highlighting the network of relationships, both historical and contemporary, is a way to investigate the structural conditions that support and reproduce not only certain subordinations (e.g., racial) but also their connections with other social phenomena, both locally and globally.

The lack of critical analysis of these structural conditions quickly leads to the perspective narrowing to mere shallow presentism, which corresponds with what Laura Nader (2019) refers to as the "politics of silencing," often implemented by

academic institutions themselves, as exemplified by the termination of Ghassan Hage's employment. Hage's engagement on social media, where he critically highlighted the intersectionality of ethnic nationalism in Israel and violence against Palestinians, attracted media attention. In Germany, as well as in some other countries, any comparison of ethno-nationalisms that includes Israel and its relations with others is not only considered inappropriate but is also characterized as anti-Semitism, as incitement to violence against Jews. According to Nader, these politics of silencing function as unwritten rules applied in cases of problematic and sensitive topics, serving as a sort of consensual and tacit practice that disciplines the disobedient and neutralizes criticism that might jeopardize the attractiveness of academic institutions in the public sphere. Although Nader discusses the issue of silencing through numerous examples across a broad time span, today, as seen in Hage's case, this practice is more relevant than ever. Positioned beyond official regulations but strongly influenced by the context of cancel culture and tolerable criticism (or complete absence of criticism) on controversial topics, this practice of silencing raises questions about the acceptable limits of academic freedom and critical thought, as discussed by Butler (2009). The foray into social media, which, from the perspective of the traditional understanding of university autonomy, is seen as a private sphere but with consequences for the public reputation of academic institutions, further complicates the issue of academic freedom and, in some ways, re-centers the public/private tension that has been a battleground for this ideal since its inception.[12] However, the return to neoliberal market logic translates this dilemma into a gray area that is difficult to articulate using established criteria that would perpetuate the sustainability of the public-private divide. The issue of academic freedom in the context of social media is marked by extreme ambivalence: on the one hand, university administrations encourage academics to profile themselves, establish brands, and present their research, thereby promoting the institution with which they are affiliated. On the other hand, as a legally unregulated zone with porous and hard-to-define boundaries between private and public, views expressed on social media enable attacks on academic freedoms, including the termination of contracts and cessation of employment (Reichman 2019). Entangled in a logic of alternating exclusion from the safe space of institutional autonomy (seeping into the supposed private sphere) and inclusion within the framework of job obligations and loyalty to the institution (transitioning into the public sphere), academic freedoms and critical thought within the realm of social media function as products of the neoliberal market, which can be exploited for marketing purposes but also sanctioned and silenced. Subjected to the criteria of likes and shares, algorithmic chaining, and recommended content, and constituted as just one of many opinions, academic freedoms and critical thought are reduced to just another product of neoliberal market logic, which strips them of the possibility for debate and inquiry historically granted to them and deprives them of what Despot calls "academic servitude," the critical thought that forms the *we* of the scientific community (1991: 7–8).

12 For the division between private and public in Kant when talking about academic freedoms see Butler 2009.

Conclusion

How can we reach a conclusion? What can we even ultimately conclude?

Academic freedoms, in their epistemological roots, are not merely ambivalent – useful knowledge versus useless knowledge – Kantian knowledge, which resembles aesthetic categories of judgment or the aesthetic object itself, which must, in principle, be disinterested or devoid of interest, or within the context of English utilitarianism, useful. If we set aside the concept of aesthetic autonomy for now and reconsider the concept of usefulness, useful knowledge is also limited, limited by the very question of "what is useful?" As we have shown, usefulness is determined by neoliberal doctrine, i.e., it pertains to a specific usefulness driven by a neoliberal understanding of economy and society. Certainly, other forms of usefulness could exist as well – this is precisely where the 21st century faces an ontological break – usefulness for the environment, nature, or what is useful for the preservation of the Anthropocene, etc. The current neoliberal structure of universities undoubtedly stifles the humanistic – here, we emphasize humanistic – projections of civil society that emerged during Humboldt's writings on academic freedoms. The economic model and the evaluation mania, i.e., translating everything into metrics, reduce previous understandings of academic freedoms, and even the resistance to the "enslavement of man" (as conceived by Humboldt within the context of German idealism), to mere numbers and counting. For example, when we sign petitions to express solidarity with colleagues who have been institutionally sanctioned for expressing their critical opinions, are we not, in some way, also reducing everything to counting? The effectiveness of these petitions is extremely low, and given their frequency, they have, in a way, become "normalized" as a reaction from a certain part of the academic community, more as a voice "against" in relation to those who are "for."

The role of scholars is to always question the "status quo," regardless of the academic discipline, making the freedom to research and teach an ideal to strive for, an ideal crucial for societal change. As we have noted, this role shifts with the neoliberalization of universities. The emphasis on the connection between higher education and the labor market (as seen in UNESCO's World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century) reduces the role of higher education to the transmission of information and the development of entrepreneurial skills in students, enabling them to manage their lives, i.e., to enhance their employability. Students, viewed as "human capital" whose abilities need to be maximized, become the central focus, but solely through a model that nurtures their individual skills, thereby undermining the university's role in serving the public good. In short, as Brown asserts, "market rationality has converted higher education from a social and public good to a personal investment in individual futures, futures construed mainly in terms of earning capacity" (2015: 181). Such positioning of the role of higher education, coupled with the promotion of an audit culture that self-regulates the academic community, allows for the replacement of academic freedom with individual freedom of speech. The effects of this replacement threaten not only the concept of

critical thinking on which academic freedom is based but also the state's obligation to ensure academic freedom. This substitution reduces all knowledge to numbers and utility, i.e., finance, narrowing the space for critical thinking and the development of "useless" knowledge that could, in another context or in the near future, prove to be highly valuable.

As already mentioned, Butler interprets critical thinking as a historically grounded process of exploration, one that must address how and under what conditions certain questions cannot be asked or how they can be posed in ways that dismantle the prohibitions functioning as conditions for what can be spoken about. In her attempt to address these dilemmas and offer an explanation within the context of contemporary understanding of academic freedom, Butler proposes adopting a position of rogue viewpoints that can address the implicit and unspoken and point to the historical arbitrariness of the boundaries within which questions are asked (2009: 777). Despite the discriminatory practices that existed in universities when the concept first emerged,[13] academic freedom as an aspiration has, albeit not always successfully, provided protection for various dissidents – those who, due to disciplinary or political constraints, have invoked the concept. In this sense, academic freedom as an aspiration, even when it cannot achieve all its critical goals, remains an important political tool that enables scholars and researchers not only to maintain political and economic independence but also to protect what we call the common good.

The substitution of academic freedoms with individual freedoms is a process that is discursively connected with other aspects of society. Social practices are similarly evaluated through the discursive agendas of specific projects or are reduced to mere commodities – essentially, everything is quantified in some way. Democracy itself is also reduced to mere numbers, and this reduction inevitably resonates with nihilistic undertones and tactics dominated by fake news and a sheer will to power (even the natural sciences become subjects of suspicion in various conspiracy theories, where they are accused of falsifying reports to favor certain political or corporate interests within society).

Therefore, the question of academic freedom cannot be viewed in isolation, solely within the context of academic institutions, but must be considered through the broader relational dynamics of life's uncertainties (precarity) in which these institutions are embedded. Hage himself notes, in an interview with *Etnološka tribina*, that in today's context, if we want to engage in serious intellectual work, we can only do so by adopting a kind of rogue viewpoint in relation to the institutional frameworks within which we operate. Otherwise, we risk becoming collaborators in the process of undermining the very idea of academic freedom (Hage in Božić-Vrbančić 2020: 244). Reducing everything to mere presentism, erasing the historical, ignoring the very idea of the university, and our generally unquestioning acceptance of contemporary audit culture, discontent whispers in hallways, expressing dissatisfaction while compiling various reports, comments on learning outcomes, comments on the

13 During the Enlightenment, academic institutions were enclaves for the privileged, and for a long time, access to these institutions was not granted to those who were marked as unsuitable with regards to race, gender or ethnicity.

leadership, are integral elements of this collaboration. The reasons for our collaboration with the university, despite being aware of the extent to which the foundations of academic freedom have been eroded, may vary. However, they often stem from a sense of life's insecurity brought about by various processes of neoliberalization in society, as well as from the fear of what adopting a rogue viewpoint might entail.

Universities have never been ideal places; there have always been dissenters and rogue viewpoints, and there has always been silence about certain issues. However, despite all the problems, the aspiration of academic freedom still allowed for critical thinking and academic debate (Scott 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to defend the humanistic ideal as the foundation of the idea of the university today and, through rogue viewpoints, to allow not only criticism but also to open up the possibility of alternative imaginaries for the future of the university. Is it not precisely within the anthropological tradition of critical thought that the expansion of the realm of what is possible is inherent? Or, to conclude with a quote from Ghassan Hage, "It is precisely the anthropological tradition of critical thought that allows us to be radically other than what we are," which is essential for new imaginaries and "alter" politics of the 21st century (2015). Therefore, through this text, we aim to start a discussion: "Can we be radically different from what we are?" Can we, through rogue viewpoints, move beyond the sphere of regulation and open ourselves up to the radical otherness that Hage speaks of when we think about alternative possibilities for the idea of the 21st-century university?

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