One World, Many Knowledges

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Whatever happened to imagination?

Peter Vale

> Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.

> *Albert Einstein*

THE QUESTION IN MY TITLE should not be considered deliberately provocative although, as will become plain, I do aim to provoke a response from the reader. Nor, and this must be made abundantly clear, does what appears in these pages refer to any individual or group of people: instead, the accusatory tone of the argument is directed at all who call themselves academics, whether they chose to connect with the SANORD network or not.

As Stanly Ridge says in his contribution to this book, the SANORD network was conceived at the end of apartheid when the creative energies of both Nordics and southern Africans were focused on what to do next in a relationship which, though dating back to the age of Linneaus, had just passed through one of those rare moments in history when people can hope for better times (see Sellström 1999; 2002). Broadly speaking, both sides – southern African and Nordic – considered how they might build on the work of their predecessors, and continue to make the world a better place by recommitting themselves to the emancipatory goals that can still be tapped from the Enlightenment project. They imagined a better world than the one that was ending.

It is no surprise that university people, who above all treasure the realisation of human potential offered by the search for the truth, should have been persuaded that deep-seated ties of support for the liberation cause could easily translate into university co-operation. The result was the formation of SANORD with its inclusive spirit, its networked organisation and the compelling appeal of its North–South axis. So, using Darwinist language, one might safely say that SANORD was a natural development from the trust

that had been built between a southern Africa which was finally free and the Nordic people who had done so much to bring this about.

But, if hard truth be told, the moment that was seized upon by SANORD's visionaries was not a good one to explore the great potential promised by the changes taking place, even if many considered it to be a hinge of history. Rather than being a time when both politics and minds thawed after the deep freeze symbolised both by apartheid and the Cold War, the very best of hopes were soon dashed and the best of intentions seemed to close off – and quickly, too. Provocatively, I want to suggest that SANORD, for all the undoubted successes illustrated in the essays in this book and in the organisation's Annual Reports, has been similarly hamstrung by a discourse (and practice) of social control that has closed minds instead of freeing them.

How was this closing possible at a time when (to quote Irish poet, Seamus Heaney) 'hope and history rhymed'? Answering this question is the business of this chapter. Although a difficult undertaking, understanding the answer is essential if, as all involved in the project hope, SANORD is to fulfil the emancipatory promise of its founding.

Carbon dating

Although it is difficult to explain, as we will see, carbon dating the moment at which minds closed is easy – the year was 1989; the month, November; the iconic instant, the breaching of the Berlin Wall on that city's famous Friedrichstrasse. The overarching historical phase was the ending of Communism – first in Eastern Europe, then in the Soviet Union, and later elsewhere too. What caused the collapse of this dominant global system remains to be answered clearly and with confidence. Was it, as neo-liberal economists claim, the success of Thatcherism initially, and later of Reaganism? Did these leaders, and the economic system they unabashedly espoused, press the Soviet Union to compete beyond its capacity? Or was it that the United States (and perhaps its allies too) simply believed that they no longer had anything to fear militarily from the Soviet Union and its allies? Perhaps it was the ultimate recognition of the common-sense significance of the famous challenge in Franklyn Delano Rooosevelt's inaugural address as America's thirty-second president: 'the only thing we have to fear is fear itself'. Or, to bring the explanation forward in time, was it the growing force of electronic technology – beginning with the humble fax machine – that finally ended the capacity of states to successfully corral populations and, more importantly, control the flow of ideas?

Whatever the explanation, the fall of the Berlin Wall was a catalytic

moment in international politics and in the way in which lives were lived across the world. Afterwards, although everything looked the same, almost everything had changed. As a result, what was once unthinkable became almost commonplace. How else, dare one ask, could a country like Germany which was once divided by bricks, barbed-wire fences and (especially in late 1961) the crack of bullets, reunite again and, given the extent of the ideological antagonism that had divided the country, join NATO, a quintessential Cold War institution? If explaining these events presented one set of puzzles for what would later be grandly called 'global change', the political side-show in southern Africa was equally perplexing.

So, to use an apposite example, how do we explain that, even prior to the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, the almost century-long conflict over Namibia ended with the country achieving its independence? That country's liberation movement, SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation), which had long been the beneficiary of much Nordic largesse, came to power after a transition presided over by apartheid South Africa, which was effectively the colonial power, and the United Nations which had long been the ward of the disputed territory. With this shift, the 30-odd-year serial war in Angola ended. And with it, Castro's courageous Cubans returned home, apartheid's external war machine was slowly wound down, and this is too often forgotten, its soldiers returning to barracks.

Then, and almost in quick succession, an apartheid president made a speech of both hope and history which set in motion a transition in South Africa itself. It was not to be easy but, in the end, instead of facing the fire that had long been predicted as its fate, South Africans took hands to move forward. Here, too, a liberation movement – and the ANC (African National Congress) especially – which had also enjoyed Nordic munificence, was elected to power. But, and this is at the centre of the SANORD story, the southern African region which had itself been held captive by the wars in South Africa and Namibia, could begin life anew. In some places, Mozambique is a good example, South Africa ceased its surrogate war against that country's people while elsewhere – Zambia most famously, perhaps – long-standing presidents yielded to the power of democracy.

But, and this is in the form of a brief research agenda, the complexity of the link between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the freeing of southern Africa has not yet been well explained. Using the counter-factual as a point of entry, we can ask a few suggestive questions about the possible links. Would apartheid have ended if the Berlin Wall had not come down? What was the link between the ending of apartheid and Mikhail Gorbachev's twin strategies of *perestroika*

and *glasnost*? How are we to understand these ideas (and the outcomes they unleashed) against the backdrop of what American political theorist Samuel P Huntington called the 'Third Wave of Democratization' (1993: 3)? Or, less ambitiously but, probably, more appropriately in domestic South African terms, what are we to make of the role of a powerful counter-cultural movement of Afrikaner youth, known as, *Voëlvry*, on the ending of apartheid? This was the rise and revolt of the Afrikaner youth – their Paris 1968, if you like – against their parents and the political party that had nurtured them. Then, and crossing only one of South Africa's many divides, what was the role played in both the ending of communism and apartheid by Olivier Tambo's 1985 call to 'make apartheid unworkable, make South Africa ungovernable, prepare the conditions for the seizure of power by the people' (Tambo 1985)?

We don't really yet know the answers to these (and a myriad of other) questions; indeed, we must accept that it is possible that we will never fully answer them because partial understandings and explanations are often all that is on offer, no matter how hard academics try to find the truth. To get there, if that is our goal, will require language that will enable us to grasp the interwoven strands of economics, politics, sociology, cultural studies (and several more disciplines, besides) in order to ask both the kinds of new questions that will forge answers that remain illusive. So, part of what academics have to do is exercise patience, which is in short supply in a busy materialist world, and in the now seemingly mindless pressure to publish. Scholars must wait for knowledge and, most importantly, language to catch up with the questions that need to be answered – or, to put it slightly differently, intellectuals must create the space so that society can fashion answers to the questions still to be asked. To appreciate these issues, all scholars need to understand (following the lights offered by Ludwig Wittgenstein) that the limits of our knowledge are decided by the limitations of vocabulary and, its corollary, that knowledge is a prisoner of language.

One of the explanations for the end of the Cold War (and indeed of apartheid) has held water for the best part of a decade, and was advanced by Huntington's student, the Japanese-American theorist, Francis Fukuyama. His controversial neo-Hegelian explanation is best known by the catch-phrase, 'the end of history' which carried his ideas into both popular culture and everyday analysis. This is not the place to disentangle the myth from the reality of Fukuyama's argument nor, indeed, to survey the rich literature – a veritable cottage industry – that has grown up around his explanation. Instead, my interest is to use some of Fukuyama's thoughts to anchor some ideas about the evolution of SANORD's work, in the hope of explaining

what has happened to higher education since the end of the Cold War and apartheid, and in an effort to explain the effects of this on the work of those involved in what (these days) is fatuously called the 'knowledge economy'.

Interestingly, Fukuyama, believed that the post-Cold War period would be a very, very sad time. He wrote that 'the struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk imagination, and idealism would be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of consumer demands' (1989: 18).

While many serious minds have contested, and correctly so, the extravagance of Fukuyama's claims, especially the idea that history, in its epic condition would (or, indeed, could) simply end, few who have lived through the past two decades could fault the clairvoyance of this claim. The years since the ending of the Cold War have been a dreadfully dull time in which the prosaic seems to have triumphed over the politically important; in which the economic imperative rather than the socially relevant has marked the course of public debate throughout the world; and in which violence in all forms has been visited on the poor on every continent. It has also been an age in which mindless consumerism has largely conquered the deep consciousness required to build a more equitable and accessible world. These, of course, were the very high-minded ideas that first drew the Nordic people into supporting the southern Africans. This switch in thinking has made it more difficult to secure a peaceful, prosperous and planet-friendly future. It is not, therefore, surprising that the creative energy of the humanities, which should awaken humankind to alternative ways both to live and understand, have been driven into the corners of campuses across the world. Looking at the countries through which SANORD's writ runs – the southern African region and the Nordic countries – we might ask how this came to pass, especially since it was the humanities – with its free-thought and commitment to emancipation – that delivered the end of apartheid and freed southern Africa's people; outcomes for which so many on all sides sacrificed so much.

So, it remains a great irony that whilst solidarity, political support and education were the great 'instruments' of the Nordic–southern African partnership, they feature today as a minor part of the terrain in which SANORD may have to chart its future course. It is as if the achievements of the past – and the ways of making and building upon the successful earlier partnership – have been obliterated by foreign ways of knowing, of explaining, of understanding. In the place of human-centred ways of knowing, experimental science and business studies have made an impressive stand, even occupying the idea of the 'knowledge economy'.

Why has this happened?

Drawing on the fragmentary technique that has already been used, my argument advances by considering not the politics and the contemporary history that has brought us to this point, but by trying to understand the kinds of words that have trapped scholars in these bleak times. Indeed, these words have become the hallmark of the phase that Fukuyama so presciently suggested would follow the end of the Cold War.

Let me be clear, however: the argument that follows is not original; it draws from a wide range of thinkers and, as will be immediately clear, from the ideas of the Australian writer (and one-time prime ministerial speechwriter), Don Watson. In particular – and, arguably, this is original – I will focus on one word: *innovation*. This is certainly a word of our times: a fact that is confirmed by the number of times it is inserted into conversations about higher education's role in understanding and exploring the second decade of the twenty-first century. It is, however, a word which, for all its promise, lends little real opening to the broader exploratory goals of academia – the kind of knowledge that needs an open mind. Instead, it calls forth forms of social control over the essential, and intrinsically open, calling of scholarly work.

Before, the argument fully turns in this direction, I want to set a goal which lies beyond the critique that will carry the first. This takes the form of a plea – a plea not for *relevance*, though plainly that is important in a region like southern Africa where problems range from A to Z (AIDS to Zimbabwe), but rather a plea for a return, in the academic world, to an old-fashioned word, *imagination*. This of course explains the title of my chapter, but only by understanding what follows will readers understand why it takes the form of a question.

On the power (and powerlessness) of words

Shortly after the Cold War ended, a friend and sometime collaborator, Ken Booth, of Aberystwyth University, wrote a line that captured the disquiet then being experienced by most involved in the study of international relations, the discipline that he and I share. Here is Booth's sentence, 'Our work is words, but our words don't work anymore' (1991: 313). In important ways, these ten words capture the hopelessness of explanation that occurs when an epoch ends as it did when the Berlin Wall came down. But, and this is the important bit, his words also teed-up the conceptual challenges of a new world waiting to be born. In the proverbial nutshell, Booth's phrase drew closer the challenge over words – of which words could (perhaps, should) be used in crossing the multiple divides between one epochal moment and an unknown future.

Booth's point was this: words and phrases die with one epoch, and only words and phrases still to be imagined can describe and, indeed, make the next.

At this juncture, many turned to Antonio Gramsci's maxim, 'the old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear', to explain the changes that were taking place (quoted in Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1971: 276). It was, of course, not the first time that words had had to catch up with the times: at the end of the Second World War, British cultural theorist Raymond Williams questioned 'a new and strange world' that had emerged (quoted in Bennett et al. 2005: xx). But, at the ending of the Cold War, there was a particular kind of irony both in the moment and in the seemingly endless – or was that pointless? – scratching around for the means to explain the way forward.

This was because, for all their dramatic expansion in the years after the Second World War (Calhoun 2010), the modern social sciences had largely failed to predict the ending of the Cold War. How was this possible when their very purpose was the same as it had been a century earlier when they were conceived, namely, to engage with social issues mostly in the hope of making a better world? Understandably, prediction was seen as an important element in this. But anger was added to the irony because international (and area) studies, which were 'prominent foci' (Calhoun's 2010: 55) for the social sciences in the post-Second World War period, had failed, and absolutely so. As already noted, the bridge between Cold War certainty, the desultory interregnum and the new place, would be paved with words that would – perhaps, we should use *could* – both carry understandings and ensure a safe destination. Yet, as every academic worth their disciplinary salt knows, words are seldom – if ever – neutral. If this is one complication of academic work, another is that 'words can reveal but a tiny fraction of an incredibly complex life-world…about us' (Young and Arrigo 1999: viii). This has great salience for this essay and for SANORD's work because, as natural scientists know – or, at least with the Harvard Entomologist EO Wilson, should know – 'We live in a little known world' (Wilson 2005: 156). The professional way to this unknown world is, as suggested in the foregoing pages, through the power of words.

So, words weigh – or *should* weigh – heavily in the deepest deliberative moments when the academic profession is called to exercise its greatest creativity, and its intellectual twin, the greatest care. However, and understanding this point is essential, if academics know this, why have they been so slapdash in the way that they interrogate the poisonous and socially controlling language that is used to manage the institutions, universities, to

which we have devoted our careers and – all too often our very lives – in the post-Cold War period?

So much has been written about the hollowing out of the university in recent years, that the question, 'who or what are universities for?' scarcely raises an eyebrow in the proverbial common room these days. This is in sharp contrast to an age when all in the university – not only those in the social sciences and humanities – were both intimately linked to the social issues of the day and constantly wrestled with the language that made those times. At this point, the full technique of the argument is revealed: using established perspectives drawn from critical theory, it looks to the regimes of control that underpin higher education. As all good critical theorists know, the past is always a good place to start understanding the present.

Many biographies written by academics and others attest to the vibrancy, the heat and the intensity of the questions asked in the various ages in which they were written. Paradoxically, one of the best South African biographies is also probably the least known, and for this reason alone it deserves a few dedicated paragraphs.

Born in 1903 to an English-speaking mother and a father who spoke Afrikaans, Eddie Roux joined the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), founding the Young Communist League when he was a student in Johannesburg. After taking an honours degree, he was awarded a studentship to Cambridge where he took a doctorate in plant physiology. On returning to South Africa, Roux chose first a life in politics and political journalism but left the CPSA in 1936, following the purge of his mentor, Sidney Bunting. He then resumed his academic life, and by 1962 was professor of Botany at his alma mater, the University of the Witwatersrand. He published academically and, at the same time, wrote Bunting's biography as well as the acclaimed book, *Time Longer Than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (1948), which was reprinted several times. A recent study has brought to light Roux's considerable additional skills, one of which was a political cartoonist (Pretorius 2011).

With few exceptions, today's university is a very different place from that in which a well-trained scientist – even with a social conscience – could devote considerable time and energy to community life outside the academy. These days, we are drawn into the dulling routines of what is called (in university-speak) 'community outreach' – which, as all academics know, is one corner of what one might call a golden triangle – the other corners being teaching and research.

What has shaped this triangle – within which Eddie Roux would arguably

have been constantly called to account before a dean (or someone higher up the managerialist totem-pole) – is an approach to managing the university that is largely alien to its underlying purpose, namely, 'for happy scholars…[to follow]…their studies, searching only for truth…unworried by the passage of time or the world outside' (MacMillan 2009: 84). Despite this change in direction, the purpose of this chapter is not to trace the emergence of the cult of managerialism that has almost turned universities – not only in SANORD but elsewhere too – into business corporations in which excellence is judged less by the quality of scholarship than by the capacity to turn a profit. As has been plainly established, I am interested in looking at one aspect of this, namely, the kinds of words that make academics believe that the university is a place where social control is not only inevitable but correct.

Weasel words

It was of course the English writer, George Orwell that first alerted the world to the deception and deceit of language, and its grubby political use. For Orwell, words, like ways of seeing the world, were always for something and someone.

South Africa was (as it remains) a country replete with words that fashioned a pre-selected series of social options by pretending to present – in objective ways – another world entirely. In a largely neglected (but undoubtedly important) text on the old South Africa, published in apartheid's final years, Emile Boonzaaier and John Sharp argue that the words analysed in their book, *South African Keywords; The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts*, 'constitute a discourse about the nature of South African society, which reveals the logic and serves the interests of those who wield power' (1988: 6). But if the keywords used by apartheid reinforced the meta-narrative of race and charted the course of its highly bifurcated university system, what keywords reinforce the meta-narrative that has built a 'society of universal commerce', to use Emma Rothschild's (2002: 250) compelling term for the times in which we live? Are these the same words – and ideas – that have charted a university system that has engaged with, rather than critiqued, the globalised economic system that has further empowered the rich and driven the poor to its margins and, if this were not enough, imperilled the survival of the very planet?

What does this mean for SANORD, an organisation born from the success of international co-operation in ending a system whose essential features mirrored the discrimination that marked South Africa's apartheid past, as acclaimed cartoonist, Zapiro, shows in the cartoon on the next page.
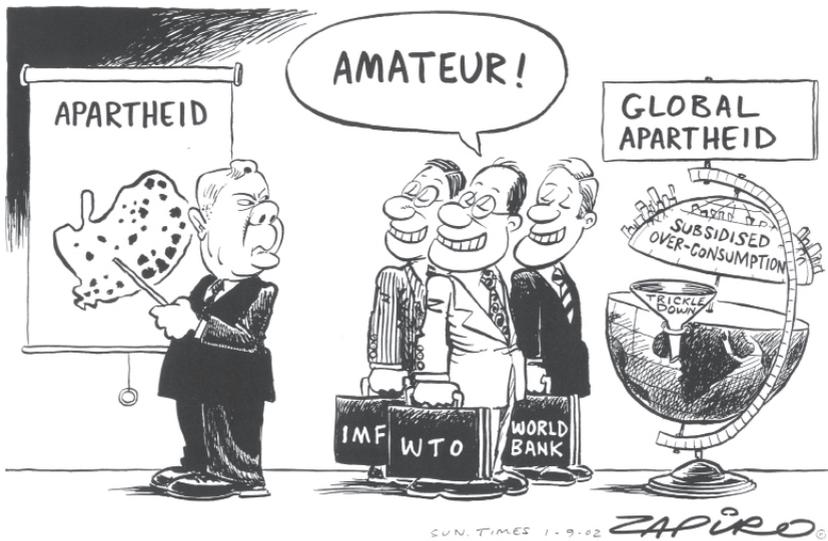
The language that has built this world, as did apartheid-speak, exercises a form of social control. Today's academic speak is deeply embedded in discourses which, like those around race, have captured a range of intellectual interests which they inform and with which they intersect. Of these, certainly, economics with its assumptions that human nature is essentially driven by the rational pursuit of self-interest is in the vanguard; it is supported, however, by management studies with its closed understandings of society, its Taylorist logic and management fads such as the 'balanced scorecard' which has all but crippled higher education (Head 2011). Through these developments, universities throughout the world have been corporatised, and important forms of knowledge have been commodified and forced to live in the shadow of market ideology. As in apartheid South Africa, the university has become an 'administered society' and serves particular interests.

But, as we have seen, language alone cannot capture the entire complexity of the life-world; particular words have been drafted to serve the interests and the purposes of universal commerce. Through their constant circulation by think-tankers, the press and the political class, the particular language they have made has been incorporated into what Don Watson calls 'the machine of business and politics' (2004: 3). Watson's frank and refreshing take on the use of language in the construction of the market-centred world of the twenty-

first century turns to America's twenty-sixth president, Theodore Roosevelt, to explain the title of his 2004 book. For 'Teddy' Roosevelt, 'weasel words' were those which have had the meaning sucked out of them in much the same way that a weasel sucks the content out of eggs (Watson 2004: 1, 3). In the book, Watson provides definitions of weasel words and, interestingly, provides examples of their use in contemporary English. Let me illustrate this by turning to a word that we have already identified: innovation.

Some months ago a senior academic manager at South Africa's largest university invited me to participate on the opening panel of a week-long series of events at the university under the theme 'Research and Innovation'. The intent of the series of discussions was clear from the sub-title of the programme which read, 'Excellence, Innovation, Leadership'. The programme itself suggested that the university was keen, not only to highlight its own 'research and innovation' but also to bring home to the university community how important breakthroughs in 'innovation' had been in other places and countries. Hovering over the keynote panel on which I served, was the idea of 'commercialisation'. One of my fellow panellists was clear about the importance of this: all innovations should be brought to 'the market'; indeed, he seemed to suggest that this was the only possible measure of the success of innovation and, by implication, of the university.

It struck me on that day, as I have written elsewhere (Vale 2011), exactly how ideological the idea of innovation has become in higher education and, to draw the thought closer to both Watson and Roosevelt, what a powerful weasel word it has become in the contemporary university. For one thing, and largely unquestioningly, senior university managers who are charged with promoting the research function are now called 'Deputy Vice-Chancellors for Research and Innovation'. This reflects, and reinforces, the fact that South Africa's research system is constructed around what the official literature calls, 'a national system of innovation'. South Africa is not alone in this, of course. Research thrusts in many countries have innovation at their respective centres: the Nordic system included. Indeed, the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Guidelines for Collecting and Interpreting Technological Innovation Data, a key tool for both policy-makers and scholars in innovation studies, is known colloquially as the 'Oslo Manual' (OECD 2005).

But, like any effective weasel word, innovation lives far beyond its dictionary definition. South Africa, along with many other countries, has established government-funded agencies devoted to improving innovation. Indeed, my co-panellist who was determined that all innovations, including

the suggestion that South Africa's political settlement, should be brought to market, was from the newly established Technology Innovation Agency which boasts a budget of R410 million (see Claasen 2010). And, in further evidence of how international fashion is followed, the minister responsible for science and technology in South Africa regularly appoints blue-ribbon panels to look into the country's progress on this front. A recent one, chaired by a senior vice-chancellor, included a number of serving and retired senior academic administrators, a regular consultant to government and a prominent business-intellectual known for his decades-long forceful support for market-driven economics (DST 2012). The group offered a doormat definition which reads as follows: 'Innovation is the capacity to generate, acquire and apply knowledge to advance economic and social purposes' (DST 2012: 4).

Used this way, innovation has become a cypher for the university engaging, not so much with society, but with the economic system – often (and this is implied) through the modernisation processes of globalisation. Unsurprisingly, then, this version of innovation reinforces the idea of the knowledge economy, and is propelled into public consciousness by celebratory rhetoric as this snippet drawn randomly from the world-wide web suggests:

> Ours is a future to innovate. Change is inevitable…and constructive change is innovation. Knowledge is the asset to be harnessed. Innovation is the process where knowledge is created, converted into products and services and commercialized in a worldwide market all enabled by unprecedented advances in technology. In the 21st century the most successful nations will be those that best harness the intellectual capital of people and all of these thinkers will not necessarily be citizens of those nations (*Arab News* 2005).

This view of innovation is premised on the endless promise of modernity offered by the power of technology, and, as such, innovation is, 'over-whelmingly predicated on a metaphor of diffusion or adaption' (Michelsen 2009: 65). In this form, the idea of innovation draws the university away from its traditional setting as a space for free and unfettered enquiry into the association that knowledge should serve only the business community. In a benign interpretation, this association began with the need to generate what was initially called 'third-stream income' but which, especially in the US, has reached the offensive point where individual academics are managed as 'cost-centres' (on this, see Head 2011: 9). The accelerating intrusion of business into the university has not only eroded the sacred trust between society and scholarship, often reduced to the idea of 'academic freedom', it has commodified all forms of knowledge. So, and to put the issue as plainly possible, in this

setting no form of knowing can exist independent of a particular regime of economics – and this regime is associated with the market.

But, for all the celebratory language around the idea of innovation, it can hardly be considered a neutral word. Its location is within a cluster of terms that celebrate the 'knowledge economy' and reinforce the ideological appeal of the free-market system (Marginson 2009: 10). In other words, terms like innovation are little more than proxy words for an economic system that essentially explain and lend legitimacy to particular actions and beliefs that they support.

So, is innovation, as it is used in the discourse on contemporary higher education, an ideology? The answer is yes, if we accept that ideology is a network of ideas that stabilise the values on which society builds its everyday existence, help to perpetuate the routines that determine everyday lives, and set the compass within which citizens (or professionals) place their hopes for the future. But this is not all that an ideology does. The dangerous part is what the late Tony Judt wrote in his last piece: 'the thrall in which ideology holds a people is best measured by their collective inability to imagine alternatives' (Judt 2010). The conclusion is unavoidable: the association between science policy and economic growth that lies at the base of the National System of Innovation – the centrepiece of South Africa's research policy – is an ideology.

The core problem is not the word itself but the ahistorical use to which it has been put. There is little doubt that innovation – as defined outside of its modern market-centric setting – played an important role in, say, Britain's rise to global power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Chang, 2010). But the value of innovation – the act, that is, not the use to which word the word has been put in the contemporary juncture, is not clear-cut as it suggests. So, innovation is closely associated with the USA (Ive 2012), where culture is not as readily associated with the achievements of modernity as once was the case. This has been shown through the processes of financial 'innovation' which have proven highly complex and very destructive of the very purpose for which they were intended. As Ha-Joon Chang notes, innovation has produced markets that are too efficient – and this has resulted in quite the opposite – because 'many complex financial instruments were created that even financial experts themselves did not fully understand…unless they specialised in them – and sometimes not even then' (2010: 231, 177).

So, the problem with innovation, as it is currently used, is that it is emptied of history and this encourages those who use it to believe that it can deliver more than it is capable of. If this were not enough, it is linked to a chain of exhortatory language which essentially draws from the same empty well

around knowledge as a commodity, technology as an essential and – and, as importantly – neutral force in society, and reinforces the idea that economic growth is a force that benefits all in society even-handedly. The underlying chain of evangelistic-type logic draws international organisations and states towards the idea that science, technology and innovation play an *economic* role in securing 'successful' societies. This is utopian-type thinking that most involved in innovation studies would eschew if they were to reflect on what they were saying rather than endlessly celebrate the limited achievements of the field.

And yet, serious scholarship, even in the narrow field that has grown up around the idea of 'innovation studies', suggests that the 'poor hardly feature in innovation studies' (Lorentzen and Mohamed 2010). This, to twist Hannah Arendt's thinking, only confirms the notion that as words – in this case, innovation – become empty, deeds become brutal. But what of the much-vaunted idea that 'social innovation' offers a palliative – or even a counter-narrative – to the high-level (read technical) end of innovation? Essentially this fails because bringing about fundamental social change requires interventions that lie beyond the parameters of market-driven thinking – the idea of innovation stabilises this thinking, proposing that all social relations are mediated by money. If truth be told, was not the most successful social innovation in modern times – certainly the 'innovation' that benefitted the most lives – the implementation of the National Health System in the United Kingdom in 1948? Decidedly, this lay beyond the market.

Imagination
Rather than the mindless repetition of weasel words, the exercise of imagination should be integral to how academics approach both their own labour and the labour that governs them. But, sadly, John Dewey's truism that 'every great advance in science has issued from a new audacity of imagination', has been almost lost to the professional academic calling.

Instead of allowing scholars to fully explore what lies beyond 'our little known world', to use EO Wilson (2005) again, the rituals of individual disciplines, the routines of higher education management, and the current ideological moment have arrested understanding in the same way that the Lilliputians chained Gulliver on his famous journey to their country. At first, the citizens of Lilliput saw Gulliver as a resource: certainly he was seen as helpful in dissolving various hurdles they faced. But, with time, this faded and they turned on him forcing him to escape. The lesson surely is this: the harnessing of scholarship to serve the goals either of the state or the dominant

ideological fashion is invariably fleeting. But the deeper danger is that it is counter-productive and destructive of the very purposes of scholarship itself. This is what Nordic and other scholars throughout the world said of the kinds of knowledge that made apartheid.

In this struggle, as this chapter has been at pains to show, words play a crucial role. They awaken us to the limits of what it is that we know, and they can promote ends and purposes in much the way apartheid did. Understanding this may force imaginative minds to search out explanations and meanings which lie beyond the low horizon provided by economics.

For me, this charts the challenge for SANORD. Can the organisation rise to the hopes of its founders and imagine that a new world is possible? Or will it follow the knowledge economy towards the barren fields and the emptiness of weasel words.

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