A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF
THE DISCOURSE OF INNOVATION:
LEARNING AND CONTROL IN
KNOWLEDGE CAPITALISM

INTRODUCTION

Creativity and innovation are words that are endlessly repeated in the contemporary organizational environment, to the point where a specialist in the area concludes that Western organizations are experiencing what can be termed ‘neophilia’ – the cult of the new (SIEVERS, 2007, p.1). According to this writer, since the traditional means of organizational change and maximizing profits has either proved inadequate or failed completely, capitalism has resorted to the idea that the old is bad and thus the new must always be better.

A similar appraisal was made by the sociologist Osvaldo Lopez-Ruiz in his doctoral research thesis, (published in book form), of the executive directors of multinationals and the spirit of capitalism. The author concluded that: “one of the most significant signs of ‘ethos’ (which he attempted to describe) “is the obsession with the new... Innovation, change, creativity and entrepreneurialism are words that carry weight inside the large corporations and also, to a great extent, outside of them “(LOPEZ-RUIZ, 2007, p.70).

The issue of change has a long history in practice and in the literature on organizations, and thus one is not entering into a new debate in this area. In that case what are the specific features of the context which Sievers and Lopez-Ruiz refer to as permeating the whole discourse of the new? Terms like creativity and innovation seem to bring about another kind of feeling. Whereas the debate about change leads us to a particular occasion of organizational transformation, (an incident with a fixed date supported by a project which when implemented lays stress on a final result), in contrast, there are categories that form a nucleus in the productive process and contemporary organizational practices that treat the idea of change as something constant and permanent.

In a similar way, the academic world has also been permeated by the discourse of permanent innovation. In his book, ‘Knowing Capitalism’ Nigel Thrift (2005), drawing on studies that highlight this question, shows us how there has been a growing symmetry between the academic world – thought of in the Greek sense as involving various institutions concerned with artistic, literary, philosophic and scientific teaching – and businesses, particularly in the way that the two institutions share the same anxieties with regard to the need to innovate and turn ideas into knowledge.

In the view of Thrift, this has been one of the main characteristics and specific features of this new stage of the capitalism of
knowledge: businesses have become increasingly academic, while the academic world has become increasingly governed by businesses. Thus, according to Thrift, at the same time that academic subjects are being absorbed by the market and making capitalism more intelligent in so far as it can make use of a highly qualified labor force, the discursive apparatus that is driven by business schools, is giving legitimacy to this state of affairs by imposing a form of knowledge that reflects its image on the academic world. In other words, it is a means of producing knowledge rapidly, so that it is able to meet its demand for a practical type of knowledge. It is not by chance that “the academic study of business increasingly stresses the importance of information and knowledge, including the chance to innovate on the basis of ‘learn-how’, the rationale of which lies in using the potential of knowledge that is bringing people together” (Thrift, 2005, p.22).

In the light of this, I would like to raise two queries which I will seek to answer at the end of this essay: the first is to understand why this discursive inflation occurred around the concepts of creativity and innovation in the form of a new cult; the second is to attempt to understand how this discourse is related to the challenges that have been thrust on the academic world that is in search of permanent innovation (metric systems of productivity, and a greater dialogue with the needs of the market), as well as to discuss their effects.

It is clear that innovation has always been of fundamental importance to the capitalist production process, as can be seen in the first part of this text, but any reader with the slightest awareness of current business literature, must agree that the discourse surrounding innovation has acquired a broader and more persistent dimension in the last few decades. This leads to my second question which is to understand the way that this discourse overlaps so closely with the academic world and its effects. Again it should be noted that there is nothing new in stating that innovation also forms a part of the academic context. However, those that take part in this world and write about this phenomenon – as will be seen throughout this essay – know very well that the relationship between innovation and the academic world, which is pervaded with what I call here ‘the cult of the new’ refers to a new context.

As the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek teaches us: “what characterizes the human discourse is the irreducible hiatus between the expressed content and the act of expression... The act of relating something publicly is never neutral; it affects the content itself of what is being related.” (Zizek, 2006). Thus, I intend to deconstruct this discourse about the importance of the new and understand the reasons for it. I connect this discourse – which emerges as a kind of permanent innovation – with a new stage of capitalist development that places knowledge at the center of the productive process.

In the first part of this text, when I discuss the value of the new, I seek to make clear how this process has occurred and the challenges that it raises today in supporting this model in an organizational context based as it is, on a ‘speeding up of the acceleration’ of innovation (Fuller, 1981).

In the second part, which deals with the commodification of types of knowledge, I will focus on the second aim of this essay, which is to understand the effects of this ‘cult of the new’ on the academic world and how it particularly affects business schools, although it is not confined to them.

In the final part, I put forward the idea that that the discourse of innovation can be thought of as a part of a new regime of domination, which is described by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze as ‘societies of control’.

**THE VALUE OF THE NEW**

The cult of the new often appears in the form of a discourse about the importance of creativity and innovation, terms which do not exclusively belong to the domain of management. Creativity, which derives from the Latin verb ‘creare’ – to make or invent – is a focal point of the Human and Social Sciences, in particular, Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology, as well as Business Administration. Innovation can also be regarded as the act of creating, inventing or renewing and making something that exists in a new way that is different from usual. When employed in an organizational context, innovation is restricted to a utilitarian concept – it is creativity put into practice – and, more precisely, it means creativity put to the service of creating something of value for organizations.

Innovation has always been the essence of capitalist development, as has already been pointed out by the great theorist, Joseph Schumpeter in
his work, ‘The Theory of Economic Development’, originally published in 1911 (SCHUMPETER, 1982). In this work, Schumpeter also seeks to distinguish the role of creativity - or invention - from innovation: whereas the former is the creation of ideas, the latter is what allows these ideas to be put to use. Hence, innovation was the reply found by Schumpeter to understanding the force that incessantly changes capitalism. And this capacity of innovation is believed to be a very special agent – an entrepreneur or businessman, i.e. an agent able to innovate or rather, to do things that have already been carried out, in a new way.

Thus, at first sight, it seems that we are witnessing a revival of schumpeterian ideas that are grounded in the contemporary obsession with innovation and entrepreneurialism. However, these concepts reappear in a socio-historical scenario that is different from what was analyzed and idealized by Schumpeter, and surround the capitalist spirit of small and medium-sized companies. In the light of the fact that innovation continues to be essential for contemporary capitalism, it now occurs at another level: we are faced with a new stage of capitalist development which is the product of a third technological revolution which has radically changed the application of knowledge to the main productive forces. It is only when it is based in this setting that we can understand the real meaning of the words creativity and innovation in the contemporary organizational scene and their immediate consequence, which may be the management of knowledge.

The cult of the new has brought about different processes of organizational change, such as ‘downsizing’ and re-engineering. According to Sievers (2007), the manner in which the re-engineering processes were accepted by a very large number of companies in the 1990s, can be seen as the embodiment of this cult. It certainly deals with one of its facets. However, I intend to focus on another component of this process – the search for the means of obtaining access and control over human knowledge. This perspective can be approached from two fronts: the first is by examining the inner context of the organizations and assessing how this has emerged in a form of ‘soft’ domination (COURPASSON, 2000) over the workforce and it involves management models such as the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) among other recording and monitoring techniques. The second is grounded in a broader perspective, which requires extrapolating the organizational context which involves the relations between understanding, knowledge and value. It is this second front that I am interested in, in so far as it is this which is more closely bound up with the question of innovation in the academic context.

Yet before this relationship can be understood in greater depth, it should be made clear what role innovation acquires in this new stage of capitalism. Andre Gorz, whose analysis is centered on the information revolution and the challenges that this poses for capitalism, remembers how, at the outset, this revolution was aimed at reducing production costs. Once it had achieved this objective, which was to prevent a fall in the price of commodities, the next stage was to add non-material qualities to these products so that they could yield profits that were symbolic of total control or in other words, could be priced very high by means of advanced payments or exclusive rights in the offer of products and services that were notable for their ‘design’ or brand name.

From this time onwards, built-in obsolescence began to play a central role and permanent innovation began to acquire its current dimensions. In other words, it is not only a question of producing new items at an increasingly hectic speed but above all “to change the concept of invention in commodities and put an item in the market as a product with a patented brand” (GORZ, 2005, p.42). Nonetheless, as Gorz makes clear, knowledge, in principle, is not something that is available simply to be manipulated as merchandise.

And it is exactly this that poses a challenge to capitalism in this new stage. The heavy investment in private research, focused on innovation and linked to a huge investment in advertising, envisages exclusive markets for production and seeks “to endow commodities with the incomparable, priceless, peculiar and unique value of works of art... “(GORZ, 2005, p.11) or put more simply, they are forms of knowledge that lead to exclusive profits. On this point, Gorz reminds us how the so-called knowledge economy comprehends the actual negation of the commercial capitalist economy in so far as its central productive force must make use of something which “is not any kind of commodity, its monetary value cannot be determined and it has no costs; its propagation makes its more fruitful and its privatization reduces it and contradicts its essential features”.

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This explains why the term ‘knowledge economy’, regarded as a new form of capitalism, is able to conceal all its potential adverse effects (GORZ, 2005, p.59).

In his analysis of knowledge capitalism (THRIFT, 2005), Nigel Thrift also highlights the fact that innovation necessarily involves generating information and knowledge, but states that this knowledge is highly problematic in so far as it involves the difficulty of using it as a basis for thinking about ‘mercadological’ categories because there are no competitive markets for commodities that have still not been conceived as such. This takes something that cannot be assimilated as a public good to the limits of private appropriation. For this reason, since the productive development has resulted in an inconsistency at the heart of capitalism itself, it now works and plays with feelings of uncertainty and as a result, produces new kinds of aggregation and authority in the world. And this is possible as the result of the production of a powerful discursive apparatus which Thrift called “a cultural circuit of capitalism”. Alternatively, it can be viewed as a way in which “capitalism began to make use of a discursive apparatus that, through a continual production of propositional and prescriptive knowledge has the power to make its theories and descriptions of the world become effective in the production of new machines and new corporations” (THRIFT, 2005, p.11). The business schools, the consultants and the gurus of the world of management had and have, according to the author, a key role in moulding this world.

Thrift believes that before we can understand the logic of this type of capitalism – which is constantly in a state of flux and which with increasing rapidity is embodying knowledge and innovation and is more adaptable than its previous models – it is necessary to understand how the so-called information revolution was combined with the three new capitalist developments:

- new ways of producing commodities, involving production for consumption, as well as the valuation of brands, patents and funding
- new systems of time and space for production, with the development of a knowledge logic put at the service of new spatial arrangements involving a reduction of stock, production engineering and faster consumption with continuous monitoring and finally, ways of managing and hence controlling knowledge and
- a new kind of discourse, which the author describes as the ‘cultural circuit of capitalism’ which has allowed the academic and business worlds a greater linguistic sharing and use of the word ‘culture’.

With regard to this last point, the cultural turning-point in social theory from the viewpoint of post-modern theories (EAGLETON, 2005) coincided with the cultural circuit of capitalism which was put into effect from the 1990s onwards. This began to lay stress on the overlapping of the economy and culture, as is corroborated by the analysis of post-modernism by Frederic Jameson (1996), which was treated as the cultural logic of belated capitalism.

This discursive apparatus reveals a new matrix of intelligibility based on the way that the process of invention is assessed and regulated. Regarding the importance of this discourse in disseminating and sustaining this logic, what can be stated is that, from the real perspective of the way it functions, it has constantly raised new challenges to companies. Since these are no longer able to bear the accelerated and intermittent process of bringing about, (within their internal limits), the next big idea that can be incorporated as merchandise, these companies break off their relations with the academic world so that they can extract an idea from this world, which can be converted into an innovation for the market.

**THE COMMODIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE**

The following section includes a reflection on the state of knowledge and science when in the words of Herminio Martins (2005), its capitalization becomes a determining factor in contemporary capitalism.

In her research into the implications of the informalization and corporatization of knowledge skills, Maria Cecilia Díaz-Isenrath (2008), conducts an in-depth analysis of the electronic and digital information constellation to state that “there is no area of knowledge where ‘information’ has not begun to have a significant effect on research practices”. “What is thus in question is less the so-called information economy or the society of knowledge as a socio-economic reality and more a
kind of problem that involves the ‘mainstream’ economy, theories of administration and systems analysis. As well this it leads to the intervention of the subjects and objects that they know how to ‘speak about’. What happens when the production of meaning is handled as production in the economic sense and when it begins to be the object of ‘management?’ (DIAZ-ISENRATH, 2008, p. 80).

The author includes an analysis of the following a search tool in the web, a congress and its materials about the knowledge of management, the network protocols, a database of a publicly-funded research agency and a methodological perspective through which “discourses about technologies form a part of these technologies”. On the basis of this, she provides a wealth of detail to show us, how, as a result of a new kind of political and economic rationale grounded on neoliberalism, the so-called information systems “transform knowledge practices and the value of production” (DIAZ-ISENRATH, 2008, p.9).

In this context and following the author’s line of thought, we find that as a result of these grey areas in the sciences regarding the production and management of the conditions of uncertainty surrounding informational capitalism, “the bastions of the different professions begin to be cut across by techniques designed to exercise an authoritatitive control, notably budgetary accounting methods and auditing” (DIAZ-ISENRATH, 2008, p.23). It is a question of new methods of control: “calculation, monitoring, evaluation and management can appear to be at the same time simple and all-purposeful, limited but apparently without limits, when applied to problems as diverse as adapting to medical procedures or ‘the feasibility of having a university department’ (ROSE, 1996, p. 54 – our italics).

Thus we are about to enter a debate regarding the control of working knowledge – this time within the academic world itself. Here the question of control also features in a dual sense, as is the case in the context of entrepreneurial organizations: On the one hand, it is based on the introduction of means of auditing and academic assessment such as reports, scoring, ‘ranking’ and ‘benchmarking’; on the other, it depends on the broader sense of the capitalization of academic-scientific knowledge for commercial ends.

With regard to this, an example is the analysis conducted by Diaz-Isenrath on the the creation of Google with the aim, according to the author, of finding a way of “drawing on a micropolitical perspective to approach the implications of the processes involved in the digitization of knowledge” (DIAZ-ISENRATH, p.2008, p.37). The author demonstrates in what way scientific knowledge was being appropriated by the business logic by arguing against an article written in 1998 by the two founders of Google, Lawrence Page and Serge Brin – who wrote a doctoral study in computer engineering at the University of Stanford, and were requested to set up a business register for the Securities and Exchange Commission in 2004.

Based on a long description of an article written by authors who were still students, she shows that Page and Brin write as if all their colleagues and other scientists and technicians in the academic field were involved in developing the project. At the same time, they state that this article will be the first public account of the creation of this kind of tool, which will be a research tool. When their response to this request appeared on the scene, six years later, the document was “directed at investors. This description, which was published in 2004 (the firm at that time became a public company), did not concern “the anatomy of the system” or the algorithm, but either “the company’s mission” or the “business model” or the “plan of action” (DIAZ-ISENRATH, 2008, p.52).

Whereas in their article of 1998, Page and Brin, explained that they had planned the system to assist colleagues and students doing research to “make a quick entry, process large chunks of the web and produce results or carry out useful experiments” (BRIN and PAE, 1998, p.109), the request for a register only six years later, made it clear that “research and experimentation should not be restricted to ‘research’ in the strict sense”. The risk factors involved in the relation between the corporate framework and the technical system are also exhaustively described in the document in question.” (DIAZ-ISENRATH, 2008, p.52).

The Brazilian philosopher, Marilena Chaui (2003), in a dialogue with the work of Michel Frietag (1996), helps us understand in the broadest terms, the logic of the application of this entrepreneurial rationale in the academic field. Setting out from a conception of the university as a social institution – which aspires to universality, together with social and political legitimacy, and autonomy of knowledge in the eyes of the
state, religion and the market – the author raises the question of how the university has become a social organization that in its turn, is buoyed up by ideas of efficacy and success governed by ideas of management, planning, forecasting, control and success” (CHAUI, 2003, p.6).

Chauí seeks structural explanations for these changes in the transformation of science that occurred at the beginning of the 1940s, due to changes in technology and the mode of capitalist production. It was at the beginning of this period that science began to become a component of capital itself and a productive force within the logic of capitalist production, “where [there were] new means of financing research, and a compliance of these with the requirements of capital and the transformation of the university into an organization or an operational entity” (CHAUI, 2003).

In the opinion of Chauí, the university submits to this system of control because “it is privatized and most of its research is determined by the requirements of the market that are imposed by financiers” (CHAUI, 2003, p.8). It is within this scenario that, according to the philosopher, the society of knowledge emerges as a legitimizing principle that can enable international bodies to support and subsidize the universities.

From this standpoint, the philosopher paints a depressing picture: a kind of teaching and research that serves the needs of the age – an age of speed capital – which removes the essential property of intellectual and academic work and training, and subjects research to quantitative criteria based on the number of articles published “which the protection of jobs, desire for career advancement and the ability to obtain research grants, all depend on” (CHAUI, 2003). This leads to a climate of insecurity which, according to the author “does not bring about knowledge and innovative activities but rather, fear and paralysis, submission to the will of institutes, a refusal to be critical, conservatism and authoritarianism” (CHAUI, 2003, p.10).

Without doubt, the background of the scenario outlined here is based on truth, and in fact, insecurity is one of the facets in which the cult of the new operates. However, it is not only concerned with this. A more powerful discursive apparatus is in play, as was seen in the previous section of this study, which operates as a counterpoint to this exercise of control and is based on the logic of the creation of infinite opportunities that are provided by the information revolution, together with the prospect of a promising entrepreneurial future. As was stated by Thrift, capitalism has become a (serious) amusing game. With regard to this, the universities – or more precisely, their centers of technology – appear more as a scenario of opportunity than of oppression. The story of success in the field of invention experienced by American universities like Harvard, Stanford, Yale among others, has constantly excited the imagination of young students and teachers around the world and have become the subject of inspirational books, films and lectures since they are about the real value of learning about information capitalism.

These success stories clearly show how the link between universities and the market comes about. The most famous of these will not be discussed here – the creation of brand-names like Google or Facebook. With regard to the latter, let us pause to consider another story, published in the New York Times: Professor Baker J. Fogg from the University of Stanford, decided to create a Facebook Class in 2007 and requested his students to do a homework assignment which consisted of creating an application (app.) for Facebook. The report shows us how a simple task from an academic subject can be transformed into a big business: “the Facebook Class launched the careers and fortunes of more than two dozen students and teachers.

It also helped to inaugurate a new model of entrepreneurialism which revolutionized the technological environment, it found what became an operational procedure for a new generation of businesses and investors. The phenomenon of app. helped to release what some people call a new wave of technological innovation”. The report describes how the relationship between the Facebook Class and Silicon Valley has progressed since the outset of the project and how the Facebook engineers themselves attended the university courses; at the same time, according to the report, the students even learnt how to establish a company and thought doing this “is more difficult than creating an app.” In the end, Professor Fogg stressed that the focal point of his subject was the development of a simple application, a model that today encounters difficulties precisely because Facebook” in the development of its apps, has made it difficult to control the way they are mirrored”. However, Fogg hastens to add that things were different for those who were in a definite place and time when the
idea of the subject was launched and when the applications for Facebook were still a novelty.

The report outlined above leads us to another crucial factor in the way the cult of the new functions: the investment in entrepreneurialism, when understood in the context of knowledge capitalism, which is based on the notion of human capital, or rather on the types of live knowledge such as skills, specialist knowledge, and particular features of subject-areas. At the moment when knowledge is becoming “the most important source of created value, it is a particularly active knowledge which is the basis of innovation, communication and continually renewed creative self-organization”. As a result, the discourse of the new began to invest in this kind of knowledge which “does not produce anything that is materially tangible. Above all in the ‘network economy’, it is the work of someone whose activity is to produce something in itself” (GORZ, 2005, p. 20, our italics).

In the stage of transforming the notion of work as a creator of value – understood as production and as an outlay of human energy – into innovation as a value, the university appears as a privileged locus of human capital that seeks to seize and value innovation. It is for this reason that in this context, the conception of research is undergoing radical alterations. It is what again is revealed to us by Diaz-Isenrath’s study, when she analyzes in detail a project that is financed by a public research agency in Brazil. The study shows us that it represents an instigated research format which addresses the imperatives of permanent innovation, depends on private stimulus and is conducted in the form of research networks/communities and is dominant in the academic world today.

One of the aims of the project is “to stimulate ‘collaborative networks’ and to build a platform for conducting experiments through this collaboration between academic subjects and group research centers in partnership with industry”. The author argues that this represents a new way of organizing knowledge, which alters the effects of State intervention, as its paradigm consists of “policies aimed at an interaction between universities and companies, that have been in force since the 1980s in the United States and the 1990s in Brazil (DIAZ-ISENRATH, 2008, p. 114). This leads us to the writings of Adrian MacKenzie (2006) where the author concludes that “the integration of techno-scientific research can result in a logical position that is close to the knowledge management which since the mid-1990s has spilled over into the entrepreneurial environment” (DIAZ-ISENRATH, 2008 p.189).

**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT A NEW CONTROL REGIME**

In attempting to understand the contemporary discourse of innovation in the form of a cult of the new and its implications for the academic context, I encountered something similar to what the philosopher Gilles Deleuze defined as ‘societies of control’. On thinking about this new regime at the end of the 20th Century, Deleuze predicted that: “education will increasingly be a closed, specialized environment of the professional – another closed environment – but the two will disappear and be replaced by a permanent and terrible form of training with the worker-student and university-executive being subject to continual control.” (DELEUZE, 1992, p. 216).

Deleuze claims that societies of control are following on from the ‘disciplinary society’ that prevailed throughout the 20th Century and which had central features associated with confinement (the family, school, hospital and prison) and a constant physical vigilance. In reality, Deleuze states that, already in the aftermath of the 2nd World War, it could be noted that we were already moving away from the ‘disciplinary society’.

Prominent among the features enumerated by the philosopher to define societies of control, for the purposes of this essay, is the question of continuous training: in societies of control this is never-ending, whether it be in the company or a teaching institution. “Control is for the short term and occurs in rapid rotation but it is also continuous and boundless, whereas the subject was of a long duration, being infinite and discontinuous (DELEUZE, 1992, p. 224).

Where does this need for continuous training and continuous control come from? It was only through linking the defining features of societies of control listed by Deleuze, and combined with my own analysis of the discourse of innovation, that I came to understand the relationship between both. Training and permanent innovation are indissolubly bound up with a new strategy of capitalism, which is knowledge capitalism and which
makes learning its main productive force. In this scenario, there is no longer a monopoly of capitalism with regard to the means of drawing on and reproducing the know-how of workers, as occurred in Taylorism and the old concept of management.

In the opinion of Deleuze, the societies are thus resulting in a technological innovation driven by new machines. Each society, the philosopher claims, corresponds to a type of machine. Those of the society of control are computers. But as Deleuze also tells us, the birth of societies of control cannot be viewed as the natural result of technological innovation but rather constitute a profound mutation in capitalism which not only leads us to search for innovation but is also beginning to require new forms of collective agencies.

The terminology employed by Deleuze for this new stage of capitalist societies is interesting since one of the central features of this new model is the crisis in the system of working control, as we have known it since the time of Taylorism. I understand that the philosopher wants to underline the point that evidently control does not burn itself out but moves on to work from a new basis. And this is a crucial point to explain the discursive inflation that surrounds concepts of creativity and innovation in our time. Moreover, it is in this sense that new forms of control are beginning to produce a new accountability that depends on the notion that the world is an inconsistent, complex, paradoxical and confusing place. It is in this scenario that the new emerges and starts to operate.

I regard the contemporary discourse surrounding innovation as one of the main agencies – a powerful apparatus which subjects innovation and knowledge management to the same explanatory principle and a new regime of truth that is not only disseminated in an organizational context but is also supported by a public discourse that gives priority to innovation while focusing on scientific research which should concentrate on the production of wealth. Thus innovating becomes a dominant discourse about something which it is impossible to disagree with. “Innovating seems to lead to a kind of social obligation as much when it deals with knowledge management in companies, as in the public management of science and technology” (DIAZ-ISENRATH, 2008, p. 82).

What will result from the model-company and the model-academic world in the unfolding of these new regimes of control? What futures do they point to? Clearly, I have no answers to this but I believe that thinking about this state of affairs requires more than simply adopting the facile discourse of the perverse questions asked by the academic world, and includes ensuring that the creation and invention can be understood as going beyond a purely instrumental character, with regard to ideas of economic progress.

I agree with the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agambem when he suggests that “criticism means above all conducting an investigation that goes beyond the limits of knowledge, and is about the precise thing which it is not possible to place or learn” (AGAMBEN, 2007, p. 9). I believe we are living through a historical period when defining the limits of knowledge is becoming essential to allow us to think again about possible lines of flight control.

It is in this sense that I argue we should think about discursive inflation – it should be from a conception of criticism to an idea of innovation that leads us to a broader context, which as has been seen throughout this essay, is linked to a “new spirit of capitalism” (BOLTANSKY and CHIAPPELO, 2009), a new ethos, which is beginning to define us as ‘human capital’ (Lopez-Ruiz, 2007) and finally to a new regime of truth, the ‘regime of control’ (DELEUZE, 1992). Creativity and innovation are repeatedly referred to as showing a viable path which can replace the old industrial, bureaucratic and authoritarian order and encounter the brave new world that this opening allows us. Innovation is becoming a fetishistic word which appears as a possible means of solving problems related to education, health, sustainability, security and so on. This raises the difficulty that we face in questioning this discourse and it is in this meaning that we find ourselves when faced with a new form of a collective agency.

Strictly speaking, it is not concerned with being against innovation per se but on the one hand to reveal a certain malaise when faced with a discourse that seems to draw us to the possibility of any kind of questioning or a positivity of this proportion. On the other hand, it also shows through the logic capital if this search for innovation can be regarded as the basis of a new production of meaning where “the value of the new is combined less with progress as a form of social emancipation than a utility and item to be sold.
to the market” (DIAZ-ISENRATH, 2008, p. 84). Finally, it is a question of wondering in what way this state of affairs raises difficulties for the university as a social institution that aspires to universality and to reflective thinking in a general way.

With the aim of being consistent with my own criticism, I intend to contradict what has been defined as an academic or scientific article, because I believe that today, the power of the critic can only operate “in a decriptive parameter which dislodges or redefines the order of things and their relations by allowing, at the outset, a list of questions to be drawn up that cannot any longer be resolved in customary terms and which thus force open a crack through which the critical imagination can be shown to bear fruit. Another descriptive game.” (TELLES, 2007, p. 207).

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