



**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
DENMARK

**Aalborg Universitet**

## **On the Road to Nowhere? Some thoughts on the ideas of innovation and ideology**

Christensen, Bo Allesøe

*Published in:*  
International Journal of Žižek Studies

*Publication date:*  
2012

*Document Version*  
Accepted author manuscript, peer reviewed version

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Christensen, B. A. (2012). On the Road to Nowhere? Some thoughts on the ideas of innovation and ideology. International Journal of Žižek Studies, 6(1).

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [vbn@aub.aau.dk](mailto:vbn@aub.aau.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

## On the Road to Nowhere?

*Some thoughts on the ideas of innovation and ideology*

*We're on a road to nowhere  
Come on inside  
Takin' that ride to nowhere  
We'll take that ride  
Talking Heads*

Bo Allesøe Christensen Dept. of Agroecology and Environment, Aarhus University

### Introduction

The complexity of the entanglement between economic and socio-cultural areas of our lives manifests itself in a number of different ways. This paper revolves around one aspect of this manifestation, namely the idea of innovation. The concept of innovation implies a demand of newness, for example the creation of new products to ensure a company's market advantage or the creation of new processes to ensure a higher degree of efficiency at a hospital. Furthermore, innovation is connected with the idea of a methodology ensuring that the result

of any innovative endeavour always comes out as something new. As a methodology, innovation is supposedly capable of incorporating all sorts of inputs as means to the end of this newness. User-driven innovation would be an example of this. Imagine a production of wheelchairs with the innovative process being done by engineers and designers only. The methodology of user-driven innovation, then, would incorporate the users of wheelchairs in the development as well, both the direct and indirect users.

The demand of newness and the methodological ability to incorporate a diversity of resources is connected to wider currents within this complex entanglement. These currents has been described in a number of ways, three of which we will indicate here. First, there is the current described as *cognitive capitalism*. The French economist Yann Moulier-Boutang (2001) describes this current as a system of accumulation primarily founded upon knowledge, where the externalities – the resources originally outside of the economic sphere – are integrated into the economic sphere. Knowledge both is and becomes the main resource in *the process* of creating value as part of this accumulation. Hence, different kinds of knowledge have become increasingly important in creating new products, technologies, organisations, marketing, processes and so on, with the aim of creating more growth whether for private companies or at the societal level. Second, this incorporating of knowledge can also be seen as some kind of imperialism – as the English economist Ben Fine (2000) terms it – the increasing colonization of social sciences by economics: replacing previous assumptions of an overly rational individual as the point of departure of economics with the category of the social, highly specialized scientific knowledge is used as a analytical tool helping the economy creating new innovative value as part of this system of accumulation.

Third and last, the two first points can be summarized by the concept of a new spirit of capitalism analysed by Boltansky and Chiapello (2005). The capacity of incorporating and capitalise areas external to the economy, including areas *critical* of capitalist economy, is a mark of capitalism in its third spirit<sup>1</sup>. Within this spirit, or regime of accumulation, creativity, knowledge and innovation are sources of new economical value and objects of capitalist accumulation and exploitation. The reason is, according to Boltansky and Chiapello, that production becomes pull-oriented, i.e. its focus revolves around the structures of demand within the market, and hence creates the need for adjusting *innovatively* to new demands.

Hence, the complexity we took as our point of departure is connected to innovation in the sense that innovation becomes a methodology for helping *incorporating* external resources, *subsuming* them under an economic system of accumulation and creating the best flexible conditions for doing this again and again.

As indicated by the current financial crisis, a continuous capitalist development in the guise of a never-ending accumulation of values is not an easy task to accomplish. It is, as Žižek echoing Marx has put it, probably doomed to failure. It is the claim of this paper that the example of innovation which we will analyse, the method of creating a next practice, functions as an attention-diverter to this assumed ever-present threat of failure. It does so by continuously projecting the success of the innovative effort into a future never to be realised. In this way, capitalism keeps reproducing itself not only by incorporating new knowledge into its system of accumulation, but also by methodologically escaping into the future, as we will see. Whether it actually will fail or not is not our concern here, but the technique of diverting the attention from the possibility of failure is.

The critique of ideology will be the primary perspective in arguing for this claim. Ideology is understood here in the Žizekian sense as an inescapable condition for all thinking and not something we are able to overcome. However, it will emerge from the following that this condition manifests itself in the shape of a distorted use of concepts, and the connections between them. Demonstrating a critique of practice of concept use, it is claimed, is one of the prime tasks of a critique of ideology. Criticizing the use of concepts and connections made between them, which connections hold under further scrutiny, and which express only pretence is compatible with a critique of ideology. However, this is always facing the uncertainty, though, that the critique itself needs further correction. This will be demonstrated through an ideology-critical analysis, juxtaposing Žižek's notion of ideology and Gilbert Ryle's critique of concept-use using the idea of correctness/truth as unfolding on the method of next practice.

The article will proceed in the following manner. First, one new form of innovative thinking, described as a method of proceeding from the best practice to the next practice, is presented. Subsequently, engaging Žižek's thinking on ideology and describing this through stages of economic imperialism, a concept of practical correctness is developed, which is

used in criticizing the concepts of best and next practice. Finally, some suggestions on the implication of establishing a possible connection between the two concepts are presented.

## **Next Practice: two examples**

Let us start with the innovation discourse and the two examples of the use of concept of next practice as a methodology. Both examples originate from two development divisions in the public sectors of Denmark and Britain, respectively. Firstly, the entry *next practice* on the homepage of the British Innovation Unit<sup>2</sup>, and secondly, an example from a Danish book titled *Principles of public innovation. From Best Practice to the Next Practice* (Bendix et al. 2008). Implied in both examples is the idea of developing a tool or method for continuously improving and making the different practices (both economical and non-economical) in the public sector more economical efficient. The demand for newness enters here, because any practice which works is the best practice – but only so far. Hence, it is claimed, we need to look for something new – the next practice, and reaching this practice in a methodological way is the aim. As we will see this method bears the marks of something ideological, and in the next section we will discuss how a Zizekian informed view on ideology can help us understand this.

In the next practice entry, the Innovation Unit explains next practice as a focus on the tomorrow: it is the room for realized improvements which is there, but never here. In a certain sense what *is* here, then, is the conventional good or best practice that this *next practice* tries to revolutionize or evolve. The entry cites an interview with the late, innovation-guru C.K. Prahalad as a way of example:

“There is a lot of research focused on best practice, but I focus on next practice. Next practice by definition has three problems: firstly, it is future-oriented; secondly, no single institution or company is an exemplar of everything that you think will happen; and thirdly, next practice is about amplifying weak signals, connecting the dots. Next practice is disciplined imagination.” (Prahalad, C.K., 2004. Interview posted on The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid)”

Furthermore, Charles Leadbeater – one of Britain’s leading authorities on innovation and

creativity – describes next practice as emergent innovations initiating new ways of working, where such innovations are most likely to come from thoughtful, experienced, self-confident practitioners trying to find new and more effective solutions to intractable problems. The power point slide (*fig. 1*), depicting the difference between best and *next practice* at the bottom of the homepage, highlights the disciplined imagination of these practitioners: best practice is dominated by current focus and is adoptive, whereas *next practice* is dominated by a future focus and is adaptive.

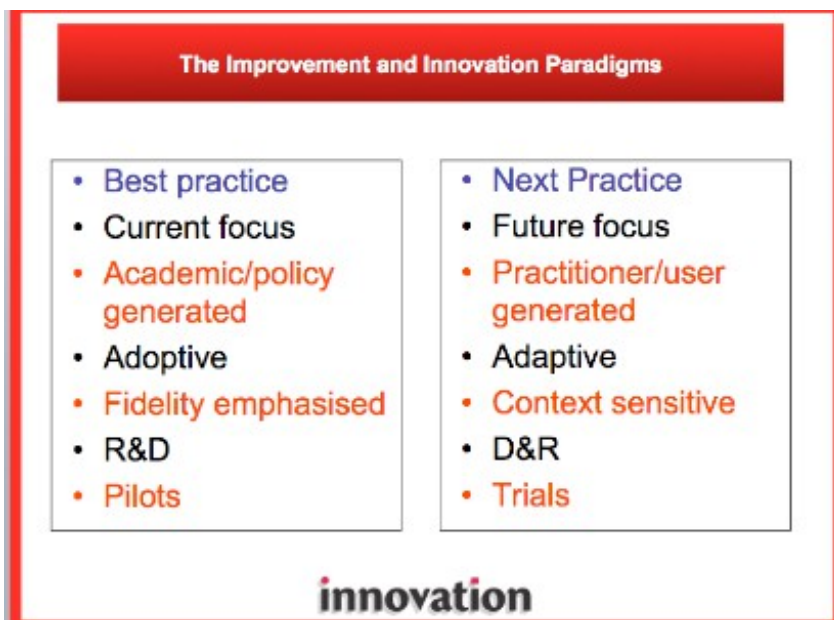


Fig. 1

Thus, next practice as a method implies a change in perspective from the best practice to the *next practice*; a change aimed at controlling thinking to effectuate a different way of doing things. Let this set the stage for the next example, the Danish book mentioned earlier, and which ‘incidentally’ has *from best practice to the next practice* as a subtitle.

The basic perspective in this book is the function of the short phrase *What if* as an eye-opener for things to happen - *What if* is the germ of all innovation:

*What if* our work is based not only on what we know works, but also opens

our eyes to what could work better? *What if* this opening gaze was integrated into all our work processes, and not only parked in parallel and time limited development projects? (Bendix *et al.* 2008: 17 – my translation)

By using our imagination as tool in this questioning process, we are capable of solving difficulties we don't know the solution to yet. The imagination process supposedly gives us the freedom of foreseeing, imagining what could happen *and* the ability to act in such a way that our idea of what could happen, actually happens. In this way:

*What if* opens up new ways of thinking and the possibility of transgressing the usual ways of doing things. This questioning is always forward-facing and proactive. It is not about what has already been done, but about what is next, the *next practice*. (Bendix *et al.* 2008: 18 – my translation)

*What if* as a method of disciplining our imagination is a practice aimed at controlling our thinking of innovation. This means monitoring our usual ways of doing things, which, of course, is the best practice *so far*. Due to the fact that innovation is more an answer to challenges changing continuously, best practice is like yesterday's news, part of an ongoing process, a stepping stone on the way to the next deadline: "*Best practice* – whether it is real or defined – is a picture of a success, but a success of the past - the conditions of this practice have most likely changed since it was pronounced as the best" (Bendix *et al.* 2008: 23). The best practice, then, is a practice in need of being replaced by ever-newer *practices*. So next practice is not about rejecting best practice(s), but, it is claimed, about making a change of perspective:

The idea is, then, not to reject *best practice*, for the target of innovation is a better practice, but the perspective should be focused much more on *next practice*. Innovation is directed forward and develops as a consequence of the conditions of, and the work and engagement being applied to the task. (Bendix *et al.* 2008: 24 – my translation)

This change of perspective, the practice of *What if* as a method, implies a different way of relating to both the more positive tasks and the negative difficulties we encounter in our usual *best practice*. It is a continuous reworking, or refining, of our practice, good (because it is the best practice so far) or bad (compared to the next practice), creating a better practice instead.

Moreover, this process continues without end, because "...one solution achieved, opens up for new challenges to be solved." (Bendix *et al.*2008: 25).

Consequently, both the British Innovation Unit and the Danish authors share the conviction that there is always room for improvement, and, hence, that we should never settle for the best practice. Next practice is placed in a timeframe of the future; it is what is possible, in contrast to the past or present, which is the already established best practice. Words like *revolutionize, evolve, renewal, open up, without end* and *what if* all seem to indicate an unfinished task of changing what has already been done. The permanent change that Boltansky and Chiapello claim is one of the signs of innovation in the third spirit of capitalism, is obvious. Besides, we should note the explicit guidance of evaluation (discriminating best from the next), guidance of action (*what if* as a method), power over cognition (the disciplined imagination) and logical coherence (*from best to next practice*) as well, all indicators of ideology according to Mullins (1972). These four characteristics are to be implied in the use of the concepts of best practice and next practice, which we will discuss below.

It is Žižek's insight that any critique of this kind of ideology is part of some sort of ideology as well. In what sense, then, if any, a critique of ideology can function as a disclosing of ideology and what the consequences of this are for the critique of innovation as ideology, we will turn to in the next couple of sections.

## **Economic imperialism, Žižek and the Ideological**

Now there is a certain undertone of imperialism, in Ben Fine's sense, connected to the ideological indicators we ended the last section with. First, presenting innovation as a method creates the sense of neutrality, of being able to be used, for example in collaboration with the social sciences. Second, the method of next practice is clearly meant as a tool for controlling how to discriminate and think about any given or new practice's possible economical development. So the capability of both incorporating and subsuming we presented in the introduction, are implied here. Hence, it will be appropriate to start by elaborating a little on Ben Fine's (Fine & Milonakis 2008, 2009) concept of economical imperialism as a way into discussing Žižek's's notion of ideology. The main idea is hardly new; it has been on the



agenda of philosophy, social science and economics for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Fine, both the protection of the life-world from an economical-instrumental takeover we find in Habermas' thinking and, to some extent, in Honneth's as well, and the opposite neoliberal economical effort in pushing this take-over forward belongs to what he calls first phase economic imperialism. Even the subtle analysis' done by the incipient figures of ideology-critique, such as Lukacs or the early Frankfurt school, trying to "enlighten" people by disclosing their distorted representations of a pre-given reality, is part of this first phase economical imperialism. Fine contrasts this with second phase economic imperialism, which is the take-over of the *social sciences* by different "alternative" economical methods of analysis. Fine (2010; 2010a) considers two examples – globalization and the idea of social capital(s) – and shows, in both cases, that social scientists believe they are using methodological neutral concepts in describing and analyzing new socio-economical configurations, when they are actually advancing already established economical structures (like the agenda of the world bank) or creating new markets.

Both phases will here be interpreted as corresponding to two distinct but inherently connected ways of conceptualizing the ideological, as Žižek (1994) has shown in his excellent essay *The Spectre of Ideology*: as ideology in-itself and ideology for-itself. The first being the immanent notion of ideology as doctrine, "...destined to convince us of its 'truth', yet actually serving some unavowed particular power interest." (Žižek 1994: 10); whereas the latter is ideology in its otherness-externalization, that is, "...the material existence of ideology in ideological practices, rituals and institutions." (Žižek 1994: 12). It is fairly simple to see first phase economic imperialism as ideology in-itself: innovation is a tool for addressing our problems with development, whether private or public. It serves some economic doctrine carrying a 'truth' potential – "it worked in our company, we developed new products – why should this approach not be transferable to the public sector". Furthermore, it can be used for serving some unavowed power interest, i.e. development as a rationalization of the public sector, thereby keeping taxes down, *and* serving as an argument for privatization of parts of the public sector in case the rationalization diminishes the level of public service. Now indicating all of this with the intention of unveiling what is really happening is, according to Žižek's definition of ideology in-itself, part of ideology too. He calls it the regression into

ideology by the critique of ideology. Hence, trying to *convince* people that they are actually reproducing suspect socio-economic structures is part of the first economic imperialism as well. Likewise, an implicit truth claim is at work here: “This kind of innovation is not transferable from the private to the public sector”, as well as an unavowed power interest, i.e. there is another specific kind of innovation, which *ought* to be used in the public sector.

To see how ideology for-it-self corresponds to second phase economic imperialism, let me quote Ben Fine (2010) on social capital at some length:

Social capital has come to occupy, even to displace, more traditional notions of community and civil society. Its proponents tend to avoid anything to do with those other great structures of modern society, the state and the market, although performance within and across these is deemed to be enhanced by higher levels of social capital. This is itself indicative of the extent to which social capital has come to be perceived as a cure-all, both for personal well-being and for the wider society. And this can lead to some dangerous assumptions. For example, the World Bank has heavily promoted social capital as the “missing link” in development, drawing on a study of Tanzanian villages which purported to show that joining a burial society was six times more important for poverty alleviation than female education.

Whereas the first part of this quote can be seen as enforcing social capital as a new kind of truth, with the exclusion of the state and the market as a consequence, and therefore as an example of ideology-in-it-self, the interesting point is the *use* of the concept of social capital by the World Bank. Social capital is used here as an externality, besides money, by the World Bank and its associated researchers. The idea behind this is one of cultivating connections between people assuming that the more people you know the happier your life will be. Hundreds of variables have been used to define and *measure* social capital, from the two-parent family over sports club memberships to what Fine rightly terms bizarre, the imaginary social capital you have with characters in soap operas. The motive behind the World Bank’s interest is, of course, practical, as Fine (2010) explains:

Despite all the hype and government-sponsored research to measure social capital, I know of no example of the concerted and successful use of social capital in creating policies. Instead, something much more sinister is at work. Governments who have already more or less decided what policy is to be implemented will use social capital to legitimise their aims. This has been true, for example, of World Bank policy in removing indigenous populations to

allow for mining projects. And large-scale mining companies have been deliberately and selectively building what they themselves call social capital with communities in order to be able to gain resource extraction permissions more fully and more quickly.

In this way, the highly immaterial substance, social capital, is double-externalized: firstly, by creating a standard compared to which these measured indigenous people are destined to lose and secondly, the indigenous people are actually moved, and probably to a place where the chances are that their social capital, according to the same imposed standard, will increase. Fine's two phases and Žižek's concept of ideology complements each other here. But what Fine misses and Žižek has realised is the internal connection between the two ideological concepts vis-à-vis phases.

For Žižek, then, a third ideological concept constitutes the realization that the first two phases are connected from the start: "...all of a sudden we become aware of a For-itself of ideology at work in the very In-itself of extra-ideological actuality." (Žižek 1994: 15). We suddenly realize that the standard we have created and externalized is not a neutral standard, but an expression of "...the elusive network of implicit, quasi-´spontaneous´ presuppositions and attitudes that form an irreducible moment of the reproduction of the ´non-ideological´ (economic, legal, political, sexual...) practices" (Žižek 1994: 15). In other words, we realize that the reversal of the supposed non-ideological into ideology has happened again, and that the critics of The World Bank, who also use the notion of social capital as a non-ideological tool, but argue against The World Bank, are succumbing to the ideological as well (but not necessarily the same as The World Bank). In summary, any "...direct reference to extra-ideological coercion (of the market, for example) is an ideological gesture *par excellence*..." (Žižek 1994: 15). This could easily be seen as a bow to some sort of postmodernism: that there is no extra-ideological reality, and all we are ever dealing with is a plurality of interconnected ideological infected discursive universes. However, when Žižek (1994: 17) emphasizes the importance of preserving the critique of ideology, even though ideology is already present whenever we experience "reality" and no clear line of demarcation separates ideology from reality, then what is interesting for our purposes are his efforts in identifying a position from which the critique of ideology is possible.

## The possibilities of a critique of ideology

So far we have presented the method of next practice and indicated its ideological character by connecting it with Fine and Žižek's ideas of imperialism and ideology respectively. Any critique of ideology, however, was bound to be ideological itself. Our challenge, then, is working out a position legitimizing the critique as critique, in the wake of a possible postmodern resignation and negative cynicism. Hence, this and the following section will try to establish a platform of critical engagement supplying the critique of ideology with a critique of linguistic praxis.

Following Kant, Žižek (1994: 17) designates the relationship between ideology and the criticism of ideology, an 'antinomy of critico-ideological reason', and claims the possibility of assuming a place enabling us to maintain a distance from ideology, however, this place "*...from which one can denounce ideology must remain empty, it cannot be occupied by any positively determined reality* – the moment we yield to this temptation, we are back in ideology". Now, I read this as emphasizing the non-existence of a line of separation between ideology and reality<sup>3</sup>: where the first two phases of critique of ideology – in their own different ways – point to ideology's misrepresentation of reality, hence, still working with a distinction between ideology and reality, Žižek wants to show that this whole idea of moving past ideology is in itself ideology "*...ideology is always, by definition, 'ideology of ideology'*" (Žižek 1994: 19). There is no comprehensible reality behind ideological reality; our socially constructed and symbolically structured ideological, not necessarily harmonious, reality is all there is.

The emptiness of the place for denouncing ideology, then, is a way of saying that we can only proceed in a negative fashion pointing to instances of *failed* apprehension. Thus, the only positive gesture we can make, is confirming this lack (of being). Now this is a rather sceptical and pessimistic view when it comes to the possibility of pointing to some sort of positively determined reality: *either* denouncing ideology substantially but still being ideology, hence, paradoxically, actually denouncing the denunciation, *or not*. The last part of this either/or consisting, as Žižek suggests, of continuously calling attention to a lack in being, in which case, we are left with either proceeding negatively or 'suspect' cases of reality<sup>4</sup>. However,

there might be a case for pointing to conditions for a positive determination of reality without the dead-end of an either-or logic, and Žižek has actually pointed to the way out of this impasse. When Žižek notes (1994: 7) that ideology has nothing to do with illusion or a distorted representation of 'reality', and hence that *ideology can be true (correct)*, that is, the objective content represented is actually correct, he is right in emphasizing the need for disengaging the concept of ideology and our symbolizing activity from a representationalist paradigm. We have to leave the idea some kind of correspondence between reality and some kind of correct or true representation of it, as it commits us to some type of un-ideological/not-symbolized idea of reality, which is untenable. However, this leaves us with the question of how correctness or truth is capable of showing<sup>5</sup> itself through a critique of ideology (being itself of an ideological character)? How can correctness manifest itself when ideology is a condition and is disconnected to a representationalist paradigm? If we can delineate the conditions for this manifestation to occur, we will have a slightly more critical place for denouncing, substantially, the concept of next practice as ideology. As claimed in the introduction this is connected to analysing and criticising language as concept-use. The next section will outline the broad contours of a critique of the practice of language serving as the framework for how a correctness of concept-use can be explored. This will, at the same time, be our general framework for critically assessing the language and ideology of the method of next practice.

## **Critique of practice, correctness and truth as correcting of practice**

The critique of ideology is a critique of our language- and symbol-using practice. It is the correct (and incorrect) use of concepts, words, language or symbols, in a given practice, which constitutes the background on which truth (and falseness) can appear in ideology. In other words, I would suggest the possibility of a critique which opens up a room for replacing Žižek's empty position with the idea of making an experience, and hence of learning something (correct/true) – of experiencing as (practical) *correcting*. Two considerations are needed here: firstly, connecting the idea of using concepts with correctness, incorrectness and truth, is both a delicate and profound matter, and due to the limitations of this paper, I can

only make some general introductory remarks on this in the following. Secondly, in the next paragraph, I am going to carry out an investigation into the use of the concepts of next, best and practice, which will show how these concepts are used ideologically in the innovation discourse. This is to be understood as part of an incipient explicating of a more general understanding of how these concepts are supposed to be used correctly. Hence, the point is not replacing one theory (the representationalist) of truth with another. Instead, I take this to be in line with Cora Diamond's thinking on the unfolding of truth that we should replace a quest for defining the concept of truth, and connected notions like correctness, incorrectness and so on, with the idea "...of clarifying, unfolding, the notion of truth, not through a theory but through explicating (a word which itself means *unfolding*) the normative constraints on judging..." (Diamond 2003: 25). Inspired by the German philosopher Martin Seel (2002), I want to show how these constraints are connected to correcting our concept-using practice. This will then serve as the general background on which the critique of the use of concepts in the innovation discourse should be seen.

Firstly, we should notice, that concept-use is, at the outset, connected to language as a medium of 'world'-disclosure and hence to truth and correctness. Even if we, as Žižek claims, are capable of denouncing ideology negatively only, this is still a case of disclosure – an opening of a place *of/for* understanding through the use of language. Disclosing is in this sense somewhere between finding something new and the uncovering *in the sense of appearing* of something – not something hidden but previously un-manifested. Secondly, at the outset it is *not* divergent to speak about correctness or truth *and* linguistic productivity as a disclosing or determining power. An idea of practical correctness can capture the concept-use as meeting the established criteria for correct use, *and* revise these criteria in case of their failing to provide the orientation for the concept-use they are supposed to. Correctness renders the fulfilment of the aim of a given concept-use possible, *but* does not entail it – just like asking the right question does not necessarily imply the right answer. So, correctness is tantamount to proper use combined with an uncertainty of the result, and can be considered as an expression of an opening up of an understanding of balancing or harmonizing the conceptual-use with the situation. Thus the dimension of correctness relates to – according to Seel (2002: 50) - the appropriateness of such a place-opening understanding of things in a

context of action<sup>6</sup>. Thirdly, truth is a special, robust kind of correctness. Robust in the sense that *true* means something to be considered further, something to be reckoned with in an ongoing fashion. For any correct concept-use to be truth-capable, a certain meaning supplied by the context must be implied. Truth and falseness is, then, the *capacity to transcend* this context connected to this meaning – that is, truth obtains when things are as the concept-use claims them to be: a *right* capturing of an instance of a positive determined reality. Falseness, then, is the fallible condition that things can always appear otherwise. Even if it is impossible to recognise it at the time of the actual concept-use – as long as the proper use is an expression of the opening understanding, mentioned above, it is always possible to grasp what it means for the concept-use to be true. Fourthly, and lastly, correctness is then a condition for truth, and truth is a corrective for correctness. Truth is dependent on correctness in the sense that truth can only be disclosed where language, and hence concepts, are used correctly. However, truth transcends correctness in the sense that even the most correct concept-use is incapable of determining the truth – transcendence indicates instead, the continuous possibility of correcting correctness. Or, as Cora Diamond might put it: the continuous unfolding of truth.

Correction, then, is a process of analysing the correctness of a given concept-use with the aim of establishing the possibility of disclosing truth – in the sense of unfolding something new and appearing. Returning to the transforming of the critique of ideology into a critique of linguistic practice mentioned above, the idea of truth showing itself in ideology depends on our *correcting* a given concept-use, but with the awareness of this enterprises' uncertainty, and hence of ideology as a possible permanent condition. With that in mind let us turn to correcting the use of the concepts of best and next practice.

## **Gilbert Ryle and category mistakes**

Let us recapitulate. We have established that that there is an ideological glow involved in the idea of next practice. Hence, a critique of ideology was adopted as perspective, accepting Žižek's claim that any critique of ideology stays ideological itself. Using the idea of the last section, i.e. truth as unfolding, however, a possibility was created, in principle, for accepting

ideology as a condition, but *pace* Žižek, denouncing ideology in a substantial manner. In this section we will put the critique of practice to the test, using Gilbert Ryle's concept of category mistake as an example of how a critique of concept-use could be executed, and the next section will try to capture the substance of it.

In the piece of innovation discourse we have presented above, a certain *necessity* of connecting the two concepts of best practice and next practice as a progression from the former to the latter was claimed. The concept of next practice was used of something there but not here, of something not yet realised and as an improvement of the already realised best practice. The imagination is trained or disciplined with the aim of discriminating the best from the next practice, making a future directed focus the right focus for the progression of capitalist growth. Žižek (1997: xv) gives us the reason why this discrimination is so important:

...its [capitalism, BAC] dynamics of perpetual self-revolutionizing relies on the endless postponing of its point of impossibility (final crisis, collapse). What is for other, earlier, modes of production a dangerous exception is for capitalism normality: crisis is in capitalism *internalized*, taken into account, as the point of impossibility which pushes it to continuous activity. Capitalism is structurally always in crisis – this is why it is expanding all the time: it can only reproduce itself by way of 'borrowing from the future'; by way of escaping into the future.

By being posited as a tool for reaching the new, that is, as a supplier of continuous development to the new capitalism, the method of next practice helps concealing the possibility of changing or the collapse of capitalism's mode of production (a mode geared towards a limitless growth) by literally looking the other way, forward. The result, then, is the *reproduction* of the same mode of production, instead of actually innovating it. It hides the impossibility of actually changing its mode of production by looking to a future, which must stay empty. The reason it is bound to stay empty is, firstly, that at the point of realisation of a next practice, a new next practice can be pictured (the escape into the future), exceeding the former and making this a best practice only (borrowing from the future). Secondly, this makes the actual difference between the next practice and the best practice somewhat obscure, because any next practice will always be the next *best* practice as well. This is where our critique of concept-use will set in. If Žižek provides the reason why the method of next



practice is important for capitalism, then Ryle provides us with *how* it becomes important.

First of all, best practice and next practice, constitute two different categorical assessments of practice. The former expresses a valorisation and indicates an appreciative stance towards some practice as the best, whereas the latter expresses a temporality, a future event, which comes next. Second, these two categorical assessments are put together with the use of *from...to*, creating a necessity of progressing from one practice to the other practice, using next practice as a method. Both points indicate that our example of a practice of innovation is involved with what Gilbert Ryle (1949) terms a *category mistake*, i.e. tying two different ontological categories together in a mistaken manner. A category mistake is a misunderstanding of the logical geography of certain concepts. Ryle (1949: 8) expresses it this way:

To determine the logical geography of concepts is to reveal the logic of the propositions in which they are wielded, that is to say, to show with what other propositions they are consistent and inconsistent, what propositions follow from them and from what propositions they follow. The logical type or category to which a concept belongs is the set of ways in which it is logically legitimate to operate with it.

A mistake, then, consists in confusing the category to which a concept belongs with another category, thus using the concept in an erroneously logical way. Ryle's prime example (Ryle 1949: 20) is how the concept of mind came to be depicted as a ghost in the machine, or, more accurately, as a spectral machine from Descartes and onward. Faced with Galileo and Hobbes' mechanical universe, Descartes – according to Ryle - could not cope with the fact that the mind was just something mechanical as well. To safeguard the peculiarity of the mind and its workings, then, a split into the physical and the mental was proclaimed, the first being subject to mechanical causes and the second to non-mechanical causes (the famous ghost in the machine). The differences between the physical and the mental were then, according to Ryle (1949: 19):

...represented as differences inside the common framework of categories 'things', 'stuff', 'attribute', 'state', 'process', 'change', 'cause', 'effect'. Minds are things, but different sorts of things from bodies; mental processes are

causes and effects, but different sorts of causes and effects from bodily movements. And so on.

The mistake, of course, was Descartes' interpreting mind as subsumed under the same categories as matter. Hence, Ryle's point is not denying the existence of either mental or physical processes. Rather his point is both conceptual in the sense that "...the phrase 'there occur mental processes' does not mean the same as 'there occur physical processes'..." and practical in the sense that it impinges upon the use of the categories "...therefore, it makes no sense to conjoin or disjoin the two." (Ryle 1949: 22) So, does a best practice mean the same as the next practice when they are subsumed under the category of progression, *from...to*? Or, using one of the categories Ryle employs in the quote above: since the *from...to* can be seen as a process, is any given process involving best practice and any given process involving the next practice the same? To sum up, if two concepts belong to the same category, it is right to construct conjoining or disjoining propositions embodying them. If you conjoin two concepts not belonging to the same category, however, chances are that you will be deceived by a connection not actually there even though it seems so. So returning to the concepts of best and next, the simple point is that connecting these two concepts together with the inferential string of *from...to* creates a glow of necessity between them, a necessity of leaving one for the other. Hence, the categorical mistake does not consist in denying that it is possible to connect best practice and next practice, only that there is a sense of necessity between them.

So the ideological import of the method of next practice consists in the following: the effect of subsuming both practices under one category, the process of *from...to*, creates the borrowing from the future. Furthermore, it conceals the fact of its own impossibility by escaping into the future through the lack of ever realising the next practice. The continuous discrimination between best and next, the disciplined imagination using *what if* as a method, and the logical coherence of a claimed proceeding from...to, all serve as a road to nowhere<sup>7</sup>. Innovation, then, is like a methodological *perpetuum mobile* serving capitalism's endless demand for growth disguised as a continuous development. Actually arriving at a next practice, though, would entail a stopping of what you are doing; facing the impossibility of the endeavour of perpetual expanding activity, hence, questioning what this demand for growth is

actually for.

## **A possible connection between best and next?**

Criticising the practice of using a connection of necessity between best and next practice exemplified in the analysis above, is a case of learning something, of making an experience. It is, therefore, an example of the establishment of an opening understanding for a correct concept-use and the possibility of capturing truth as well: correctness, it was claimed, renders the fulfilment of the aim of a given concept-use possible, *but* does not entail it. Wishing to establish the conditions for a correct connection based on the above analysis, then, we should be mindful that what is certain is the uncertainty of possible further corrections. So the following conditions can be seen as a simple plaidoyer for preserving the possibility of pointing to some substantiality within the denouncing of ideology, by considering how the connection between the concept-use of best practice and next practice can actually make sense, if we want to continue connecting best with next.

First of all, we might disconnect the use of next practice from the emptiness implied in the context of capitalism as Žižek claims. Where the emptiness of the next is supposed to be a mark of a continuous development it is probably the opposite. By not actualizing any practice you occlude the possibility of learning from any practice, and hence block any real development. One way to counter this is by realizing we are not leaving the best practice for the next, but approaching the next practice as the best: that is, realizing that lessons from previous good, wrong, bad, useful, extreme, monstrous attempts at establishing *next practices* are part of the progression from the best to the next. Second, this implies considering for whom this next practice is the best and in what situation. Since there is no way of knowing this in advance, the upholding of an open understanding for the correct concept-use could be reinforced by using the following principle as a modus of orientation: *make sure that any anticipation of next practice does not prove to be the anti-participation of all those who want a word on what next practice could be.* Third, let Adorno who, in his *Minima Moralia*, aphorism 150 entitled Extra Edition, caught the first glimpse of how ideology and innovation are connected, have the last word:

The new evolves into the merely evil first through totalitarian guidance, wherein the tension of the individuals to society, which once realized the category of the new, is nullified. Today the appeal to the new – regardless of what kind, provided only it is archaic enough – has become universal, the ubiquitous medium of false mimesis. The decomposition of the subject is completed by handing itself over to a constantly differing, unchanging uniformity [*Immergleichheit*]. (My translation)

Here this false mimesis is connected to economy: innovation as next practice both borrows from and escapes into the future and clouds this as development when in fact it is stagnation made methodological. The totalitarian guidance Adorno speaks of becomes the method of a continuous realization of the new, which fails the moment it is realized. Innovation in this sense is thus a road to nowhere, a never-ending story, leaving the innovative subject with nothing but the condition of ever changing, renewable processes, which proves empty when realized.

Adorno, further, in the same quotation, says: 'The new, a blank place in consciousness, awaited as if with closed eyes, seems to be the formula by means of which a stimulus is extracted from horror and despair. It makes evil into flowers'. We should take this as a reminder of the blindness of an endeavour searching for the new, and for the sake of the new, only. Without any ethically informed decision or at least normative guidance of some sort, any monstrosity can be installed as a next practice as long it is new. Adorno's rephrasing of Kant's categorical imperative as act so the terror of Auschwitz cannot happen again is an example of making us see the normative import of establishing a new practice. Converted to the idea of practical correctness the corresponding point is, that there is a dimension in the use of language which is connected to some idea of responsibility, perhaps language as a mode of retaining a responsibility for both the *what* and the *who* of language.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to use of Žižek's insights on ideology and capitalism in an analysis of the discourse of innovation. Firstly, the discourse surrounding the innovation method of next practice and the ideological import of the concepts within this discourse was described. Secondly, Žižek's rethinking of ideology was described and two things were emphasised in this connection. First, doing critique of ideology is not an unmasking of "how things really are". On the contrary, any search determined on this unmasking is ideological itself. Second, *pace* Žižek this was not interpreted as the inevitable emptiness of the space of any critique of ideology. Thirdly, a more substantial space for critique of ideology was sketched using two contemporary philosophers ideas of a critique of concept-use. This pictures the critique as an *unfolding* of how the concept-use is correct or not, thereby supplying the critique ala Žižek, with the possibility of a concrete space where truth and correctness can occur. Fourthly, a critique of the concept-use of the innovation discourse was made, within the frames sketched by this more substantial space of critique, by using Gilbert Ryle's concept of a category mistake. The ideology connected to the methodology of innovation was described as claiming a *necessity* in progressing from the best to the next practice. A necessity diverting the attention from the possible failure of actually innovating capitalism's mode of production by escaping and borrowing from the future. Lastly, we ended with some suggestions of what direction a use of the concepts of the best and the next practice could take as a more substantial correction, inspired by one of Adorno's aphorisms in his *Minima Moralia*. Critique of ideology as a critique of our concept-use appears as a kind of *anamnesis*, a learning from and remembrance of our previous practices of concept-use, and in this re-collection creating the opening space for something new to be established.

*I am indebted to Chris Kjeldsen and Henrik Jøker Bjerre for comments on an earlier draft of this article. I would like to thank Paul Taylor and an anonymous reviewer for comments as well. The usual disclaimers apply.*

<sup>1</sup> Not being able to do justice to the subtleties of their work, though, the following division indicates the difference between the first and the second spirit. The first spirit consists of the early developments of capitalism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in close connection with both a religious and utilitarian mind set and the incipient industrialism. The second phase, or spirit, from ca. 1930 – 1960 consists of the distribution of Taylorism, the efficiency improvement of companies through calculation and rationality – the assembly line would be the symbol for this.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.innovationunit.org/next-practice/what-is-next-practice.html> Accessed October 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Or more accurately: like the antinomies by Kant is a systematic expression of (theoretical) reason gone astray, that is, not staying within the boundaries of its *proper* exercise, so Žižek wants to point to critico-ideological reason going astray, when it claims to unmask ideology and out pops reality.

<sup>4</sup> Of being a case of ideology but presenting itself as not-ideology, of being a case of ideology even if it is a critique of ideology or the defeatist attitude of not caring whether it is ideology or not.

<sup>5</sup> Henrik Jøker Bjerre (2007: 63) has drawn attention to a possible shift (around 1995) in Žižek's thinking from conceptualising truth as a lack of totality of true sentences, and hence stressing the absence of the Real, to truth as a happening or illumination, and hence stressing the presence of the Real. As emphasised (Bjerre 2007: 64) these two phases should be emerged as critique of ideology and staging of truth respectively. The following analysis could be understood as a concrete example of *practicing critique of ideology as staging truth* in this way, i.e. the analysis, a critique of a given conceptual practice, functions as a stepping stone in the continuously unfolding of a possible truth within this practice.

<sup>6</sup> In German "...der Angemessenheit eines solchen bereichsöffnenden *Verständnisses* von Dingen, um die es im jeweiligen Handlungszusammenhang geht..."

<sup>7</sup> Coming to my knowledge too late for incorporating in this article, Huebner (2005) seems to point in the same direction.

## References

Adorno, Theodor (1951) *Minima Moralia*. Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main

Bendix, H. W., Digmann, A., Jensen, J. P. and Jensen, K. E. (2008) *Principper for offentlig innovation*. Børsens Forlag

Bjerre, Henrik Jøker (2007) 'Partisanlæsning – et forsvar for Žižeks vilde analyse', *Drift* 7:61-74 (Partisan Reading - a defence of Zizek's wild analysis)

Boltansky, L., Chiapello, E. (2005) 'The New Spirit of Capitalism', *International Journal of Politics Culture Society* 18: 161- 188

Diamond, Cora (2003) 'Unfolding Truth and reading Wittgenstein', *Sats. Nordic Journal of Philosophy* 4(1): 24-58

Fine, Ben (2000) 'Economics Imperialism and Intellectual Progress: The Present as History of Economic Thought?', *History of Economics Review* (32): 10-36

Fine, Ben (2010) 'Because you're worth it?', *New Humanist* 125(5) – quoted after the online edition at <http://newhumanist.org.uk/2400/because-youre-worth-it>

Fine, Ben (2010a) *Theories of Social Capital. Researchers Behaving Badly (IIPPE)*. Pluto Press: London

Fine, Ben and Milonakis, Dimitris (2008) *From Political Economy to Economics*. Routledge: London and New York

- Fine, Ben and Milonakis, Dimitris (2009) *From Economic Imperialism to Freakonomics: The shifting boundaries Between Economics and Other Social Sciences*. Routledge: London and New York
- Huebner, J. (2005) 'A possible declining trend for worldwide innovation', *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 72: 980–986
- Moulier-Boutang, Yann (2001) 'Marx in Kalifornien: Der dritte Kapitalismus und die alte politische Ökonomie', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (52-53): 29-37
- Mullins, Willard A. (1972) 'On the Concept of Ideology in Political Science', *The American Political Science Review* 66(2): 498-510
- Ryle, Gilbert (1949) *The concept of Mind*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago
- Seel, Martin (2002) *Sich bestimmen lassen*. Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main
- Žižek, Slavoj (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso: London and New York
- Žižek, Slavoj (1994) *Mapping Ideology*. Verso: London and New York
- Žižek, Slavoj (1997) *The Plague of Fantasies*. Verso: London and New York
- Žižek, Slavoj (1999) *The Ticklish Subject*. Verso: London and New York