

The Idea of the University in the Twenty-First Century: Where's the Imagination?*

Yirmi birinci yüzyılda üniversite fikri: Hayal gücü nerede?

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Özet

Yirmi birinci yüzyılda üniversite kavramı, umutsuz bir biçimde fakirleştirilmiştir. Kavram, üniversite ile ilişkilendirilmek üzere ortaya atılan sınırlı fikir yelpazesinde 'fakirleştirilmektedir'. Karakteristik olarak günümüzde ortada dolaşan fikirler, kendilerini, üniversitenin ortaya çıkan çağdaş biçimlerini genişletmek ve onaylamakla sınırlandırmaktadır. Üniversite fikrinin artık geniş ölçüde umutsuz olduğu yönünde de "ümitsizce fakirleştirme" yapılmaktadır. Üniversitelerin varsaydığı çağdaş kurumsal biçimlerle ciddi bir şekilde yakın ilişki kurulan durumlarda, üniversite hakkında düşünmek ve tartışmak bazen ciddi bir atmosfere bürünebilmekte, ancak hiçbir alternatifin olmadığı, umursamaz bir tavır benimsenmektedir. Bu nedenle, üniversite hakkındaki fikirler, kapalıdır; bu büyük oranda gönüllü bir kapalıdır. Üniversite fikirlerinin açık hale gelmesinin gerekli bir koşulu, hayal gücünün iyileşmesidir. Hayal gücünün yaratıcı kullanımı aracılığıyla, makul ütopyalar derlenebilir. Ancak bu tür ütopyalar, makul olsalar dahi, kendi içlerinde inandırıcı fikirlerin oluşmasına yönelik yeterli koşulu taşımazlar. Bu tür bir meşruiyet kazandırma, yaratıcı üniversite fikirlerini yeterli kriterlerine tabi tutma süreciyle türetilir. Etkili üniversite fikirlerini etkili olmayan fikirlerden ayıran ayırıcılar olarak değerlendirilebilecek beş yeterli ölçütü tanımlanmaktadır. Ekolojik üniversiteye dair bir fikir, beş ölçüt yönünden test edilmekte ve karşılığında entellektüel ve uygulamalı teminat elde edeceği görülebilmektedir. Beş yeterli ölçütünün yaratıcı fikirleri haksız yere elimine etmeyeceği, bundan ziyade ek üniversite fikirlerinin oluşmasına yardım edebileceği de ayrıca irdelenmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Ekoloji, hayal gücü, ideoloji, üniversite, ütopya, vizyon.

Abstract

The concept of the university in the twenty-first century is hopelessly impoverished. It is 'impoverished' in the limited range of ideas that have come to be associated with the university. Characteristically, the ideas currently in circulation confine themselves to extending and endorsing contemporary emerging forms of the university. It is also 'hopelessly impoverished' in that the idea of the university is largely now without hope. Where it seriously engages with contemporary institutional forms assumed by universities, thinking and debate about the university can sometimes adopt critical tones but takes on a shrugging-of-the-shoulders attitude, a sense that there is no alternative. Ideas about the university have closed in, therefore. This closure is largely self-imposed. A necessary condition of an opening of ideas of the university is a recovery of the imagination. Through the creative use of the imagination, feasible utopias can be gleaned. However, such utopias, even if feasible, are not in themselves a sufficient condition of the formation of credible ideas. Such legitimation can be derived from subjecting creative ideas of the university to criteria of adequacy: five criteria of adequacy are identified, which can be seen to act as discriminators, sorting efficacious ideas of the university from non-efficacious ideas. One idea, that of the ecological university, is tested against the five criteria and can be seen in turn to gain intellectual and practical warrant. It is further argued that the five criteria of adequacy will not unduly eliminate creative ideas but rather can act to help in the generation of additional ideas of the university.

Key words: Ecology, ideology, imagination, university, utopia, vision.

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At the very moment when the idea of the university should be opening out, it seems to be closing in. The idea of the university has, of course, undergone many shifts and been subject to varying conceptions over time. For some hundreds of years, the idea of the university

was –as it might be said– that of the metaphysical university, reflective of an inquiry that enhanced humanity's connections with God, or the Universe, or Truth or Spirit or even the State. That conception gave way to the research university which in turn is giving way to that of the entrepreneurial uni-



versity, which is closely allied to the emergence of a tacit idea of the corporate university.

What is striking about this conceptual journey that the idea of the university has undergone over nearly one thousand years is that it has gradually shrunk. Whereas the metaphysical university was associated with the largest themes of humanity's self-understanding and relationships with the world, the idea of the university has increasingly –and now especially in its contemporary entrepreneurial and corporate incarnations– closed in. The entrepreneurial university is expected to fend for itself, and attend to its potential impact on particular segments of the economy, and become distinctive. This university has abandoned any pretence with universal themes.

The idea of the university, therefore, has closed in ideologically, spatially and ethically. Ideologically, it is now intent on pursuing narrow interests, particularly those of money (in the service of a national learning economy); spatially, it is enjoined to engage with its region, especially with industrial and business organisations in its environs; and ethically, it becomes focused on its own interests. It will, as a result, close departments in chemistry, or physics, or modern languages or philosophy because it sees such closures as serving its own (usually financial) interests rather than being placed in a wider set of public interests.

Given this closing in of the idea of the university in the early part of the twenty-first century, a key question becomes this: how might the idea of the university be expanded? One answer lies in the imagination: through the imagination, we may hope to widen our conceptions of the possibilities before us. But that answer only opens up a line of inquiry: what possibilities are there for the imagination? What might be its role? Is a widening of our conceptual possibilities –for the university– necessarily beneficial? Are there any limits to the deployment of the imagination? And are there any tests that we can bring to bear on our imaginative ideas of the university, so as to demonstrate their efficacy? It is this line of inquiry that I wish to pursue in this paper.

Imaginary Possibilities

Probably Charles Taylor has done more than anyone else to recover the idea of the imagination. Taylor, however, speaks of the imaginary, by which he has in mind collective and sentiments of an age; those general concepts (such as those of democracy, of rights, of justice) that develop historically in societies, and which in turn are linked to social values and aspirations, in particular:

- *'the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their*

fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations ... the ways in which ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings.' (Taylor, 2007, p. 23)

Another contemporary voice here is that of Richard Kearney (for whom Taylor was his teacher and supervisor for his Master's degree thesis). Kearney more explicitly links the imaginary to the imagination. We have in Kearney –as with Taylor– a sense of the imaginary as 'deeply inform(ing) our lived everyday world' but the 'lived' here is important. The imaginary shapes, colours, and patterns life itself; the lived life. It imparts understandings to an inner life; and these self-understandings are always in motion. And they are at play significantly through the stories that are important in informing life; and such narratives are themselves playing against each other. There are, therefore, for Kearney, crucially phenomenological and hermeneutic dimensions of the imaginary at play. There is, I sense, therefore, a somewhat more dynamic character to the imaginary here in Kearney (as compared with Taylor).

This link to narratives and self-understandings leads Kearney naturally to the concept of the imagination. And whereas Taylor focuses on history, Kearney focuses on fictional literature, in exploring the role of the imagination. The imagination IS dynamic, is always active if it really 'imagination'. Consequently, reflection on the imagination takes risks:

- *'thinking about imagination is always work in progress and knows no barriers. It extends not just across disciplinary boundaries but across cultural and geographical ones as well. In traversing the imaginary we learn – for better or for worse – how to dwell in lands without frontiers.'* (Kearney, 2007, p. xiii)

The idea of the imaginary, however, goes back at least to Jean-Paul Sartre, not least in his book called simply 'The Imaginary' (2004/1940) and, here, we see a more radical notion. Whereas in both Kearney and (especially) in Taylor, we have a sense of the imaginary as being embedded in the world, for Sartre it posits escape from the world:

- *'For consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature, it must be able to stand back from the world by its own efforts. In a word, it must be free.'* (Sartre, 2004, p. 185)

There are no less than three key elements in this short quotation, those of 'escape from the world', a position won 'by its own efforts' and 'freedom'. There is here, as Sartre comments immediately afterwards, the 'possibility of negation'. In constructing an imaginary, we raise up the possibility of negation, of contending against the 'self-images of the age' (to use a phrase from McIntyre).



For what follows, I want to draw on certain aspects of each of these three scholars in their ideas of the imaginary and the imagination (Sartre, 2004; Taylor, 2007; Kearney, 2007). In so doing, I want first, though, to draw a sharp distinction between the ideas of the imaginary and the imagination. I take the imagination to be a power, a potential, a capability, which may or may not be exercised. I take the imaginary, or rather ‘an’ imaginary to be that which emerges from the exercise of the imagination. The exercise of the imagination is a necessary condition –though not a sufficient condition– of an imaginary developing.

At this point, we may bring in the positions of our three writers. From Taylor, we may take the idea of the imaginary as a set of social understandings of a large matter; from Kearney, we may take the idea of narrative as informing those social understandings; and from Sartre, we may take the idea of the imagination as denoting a strike for freedom.

To speak therefore of the ideas of the imaginary and the imagination in relation to university is to embrace the following elements. It is to point to the power of imagination as heralding a bold leap for freedom, contending against and even possibly negating the present understandings. It is also to point to the possibility of a collective imaginary eventually emerging from those imaginative efforts, an imaginary that will be sustained at least partly in virtue of it being buttressed by socially meaningful narratives. Different imaginations, different imaginative ideas, may give rise in turn, therefore, to different imaginaries.

The imagination, accordingly, is prior to the imaginary. This is a dramatic and key point here. For the imagination not only lives in individual minds (as does the imaginary) but it is energised by individual minds; it is taken forward by individual minds. Persons have to do the imagining in order that those imaginings may be taken up and –just possibly– may be transformed and sedimented over time (perhaps decades) into collective imaginaries. And that work of the imagination is a matter of vision; perhaps even of poetic vision. It is to find a new vocabulary, a new grammar, with which to read the conventional, the present. It is to leap out, to leap beyond the familiar and redescribe it in strange terms. This, then, is the task –and it would be the achievement– of the imagination in coming to bear upon the idea of the university; nothing short of recasting it so that we come to understand that our present images and concepts of the university could be quite other than they are.

Feasible Utopias

Yet the possibilities for and the responsibilities upon the imagination are even larger than we have described them so

far. For once we see the imagination as a resource for negation and for striking for freedom, then the exercise of the imagination becomes not only a critical project but potentially a utopian project. The imagination will not be content in simply being critical; it will not rest simply in point to a ‘university in ruins’ or ‘the crisis in the university’. Rather, it will seek to imagine, to create, new narratives of the fullest kind that may serve the university and take it forward.

This is utopian thinking. And it is an injunction upon the imagination; to strive to form new ideas of the university that could represent the university –now in the twenty-first century– as it might be in the best of all possible worlds. Of course, there is no blue-print available (Jacoby, 2005); there are no ready-to-hand ideals of the university. That is precisely the point; they have to be created anew to suit the circumstances of our age. And that phrasing again unites Taylor, Kearney and Sartre: can new ideas of the university be created that at once critique current dominant ideologies of the university, and reach out in a way that yet does some justice to enduring sentiments of the university and can –over time– yield substantive narratives that could have collective, indeed social, appeal?

That phrasing –‘to suit the circumstances of our age’– heralds a further challenge upon such utopian thinking. For if the exercise of the utopian imagination is to be credible, is to have substance, then it has to lend itself to the possibility of practical action. That is to say, there would need to be at least a possibility of the utopian imaginary –as it would have become– leading to a change in the world. Such thinking would be utopian in that it would herald the highest form of human flourishing and it would be most unlikely to come about; and it would also be feasible in that it could yet be reasonably be glimpsed as a practical venture. It could just come about in the best of all possible worlds. Such substance would be furnished, for instance, through observing examples (‘case studies’) of such utopias already being visibly even if embryonically present. It would consist, therefore, in the words of Deleuze (2001), of a kind of ‘transcendental empiricism’, acutely sensible to the present but also aware of its possibilities; in effect, ‘a superior empiricism’.

There are two further points I wish to make here. Firstly, this kind of utopian imaginative thinking would embody the spirit of the philosophy of ‘critical realism’, especially as developed over the past thirty years by Roy Bhaskar. This particular form of critical realism both posits a real world independently of our knowing efforts (hence an objective ontology) and our efforts to come to know that world, which themselves can vary considerably (hence an epistemological relativism). Bhaskar (2002) posits both a triply layered view of



the world (the real, the actual, and the perceived) and a four-planar view of our being in the world (our relationship to ourselves, to others, to social structures and to the natural world). Partly, our perceptions of the possibilities for the world can reasonably emerge out of the ‘absences’ we detect in the world – such as an absence of equality, of general enlightenment, of life chances and so on. So while the spaces for our imaginations are infinite –there are any number of imaginative ideas of the university that we could come up with– the locus of those ideas is quite real; even if hard work needs to go in uncovering the character of the real world, overlain as it is by unequal power structures, ideologies and obfuscations.

Secondly, I want to contend for a particular kind of anarchism, namely a ‘responsible anarchism’ as we may call it. In one of its variants, anarchism denotes an absence of government or regulation (Malatesta, 2001). This is, we might say, a negative sense of anarchism; an utter freedom from constraint. This idea is surely helpful to us here: if the imagination is really to take off, to fly, it has to be unconstrained. And yet flying is subject to the laws of gravity. So conceiving of the imagination here as unconstrained still allows for some overarching rule or principle.

The principle to be invoked here is that the exercise of the imagination, in bringing forth new ideas of the university, has to be responsible. Derrida (2004) urged the idea of responsibility as a key concept in thinking about the university without perhaps being able to specify what responsibility might entail. Certainly, the idea is problematic: what is to count as responsibility? But still, the idea of an irresponsible imagination would bear no weight; so responsibility as a guiding principle is of value, even if it cannot be fully cashed out. The exercise of the imagination, in attempting to usher forth new ideas of the university, has to take the form of a responsible anarchism.

We may note that, in a way, the idea of a responsible anarchism is a corollary of the idea of a feasible utopia. In being feasible, the identification of a utopia is also being responsible; it is not just a flight of fancy. And in being anarchic, it is giving itself the best chance of identifying a utopia that will be free of undue constraint, hedged in by ideology and power.

Imaginary Possibilities

Here are some ideas of the university:

- The metaphysical university
- The entrepreneurial university
- The open university
- The civic university

- The liquid university
- The postmodern university
- The pragmatic university
- The therapeutic university
- The ecological university

This list could easily be extended manifold but it is already sufficiently long for two points to be made about it. Firstly, each phrase represents some exercise of the imagination. The attribution in each case –of the university being or having been metaphysical, civic, entrepreneurial, or civic and so on– requires an imaginative insight into the nature of the university. Secondly, the formal structure of each phrase is exactly the same – three terms, with the definite article (‘The’) and the noun (‘university’) preceded in each case by an adjective. However, the imaginative character of the ideas expressed in those phrases varies considerably. We can sense here the makings of an imaginative structure attendant on the idea of the university.

We can begin to uncover this imaginative structure through a sense that there are different readings of the university available to us. Here are six readings: the historic, the ideological, the actual, the emerging, the imagined, the dystopian, and the utopian. Let us briefly illustrate the character of each reading with some imaginings of the university.

The Historic University (Past Being)

Among imaginings of the university that attempt to illuminate its past being might, for example, be ‘the metaphysical university’, ‘the civic university’, ‘the liberal university’, ‘the service university’ and even ‘the research university’. Each of these expressions attempts to identify features that characterised the university in its past; they are historical imaginings, but they are nonetheless imaginings. They conjure discreet and quite distinct images of the university. For example, ‘the metaphysical university’ is an expression that recalls an association of the idea of the university with the largest narratives of humanity, of humanity’s connection with universal concepts –alternatively– of God, humanity itself, Truth (with a capital ‘T’ as it were), Spirit and even the State (Such a conception of the university lasted for several hundreds of years).

It will be said that some, if not most, of these depictions of the university are far from historical but are present today. This is true. For instance, ‘the civic university’ is currently being revived as an idea (Ehrlich, 2000; McIlrath and Labhrainn, 2007). And even the metaphysical university is still with us in various incarnations (in the symbolism of the university, in its libraries and its scholarly endeavours. Ideas of the university –and even their practical forms– live on, even if



other ideas emerge and supplant those earlier ideas as the dominant ideas of the university.

The Ideological (Present Being)

Among ideological conceptions of the university are surely those of ‘the entrepreneurial university’, ‘the enterprise university’, ‘the business-facing university’ and even ‘the European university’ and ‘the open university’. In order for the charge of its being ideological to be sustained, sets of structured social interests would have to be identified for whom a particular imagining of the university –as say an ‘entrepreneurial university’ or a ‘European university’ or an ‘open university’– would need to be identified. Some of these imaginings of the university are, in that sense, hybrids. Each of these conceptions might be construed neutrally, with minimal ideological presences; but each of them in turn could also be harbouring large projects for the university, connected with large political and/or commercial interests.

The Actual (and the Critical)

Among manifestations of the actual university might be ‘the bureaucratic university’, ‘the corporate university’, ‘the marketised university’, ‘the commodified university’, ‘the capitalist university’ and ‘the performative university’. Each of these imaginings is, or would represent, an attempt to identify a key feature of the university in its actual present form. Again, there could be an element of hybridity about some of these expressions; or, as Bernard Williams (2008) puts it, in their readings, each of these ideas of the university could be said to be ‘thick concepts’, being both attempts to describe the world and also to critique the world. For instance, to remark of a university that it had taken on the form of ‘a bureaucratic university’ or ‘a commodified university’ is to identify a particular feature of its contemporary form (it is becoming a bureaucracy and subjecting in substantial academic life to bureaucratic procedures) and it is at the same time to critique such a form of the university.

The Emerging University

Among depictions of the emerging university might be considered to be ‘the borderless university’ (Erdinc, 2002), ‘the liquid university’ (cf Bauman), ‘the supercomplex university’ (Barnett, 2000), ‘the virtual university’ (Robins and Webster, 2002), ‘the networked university’ (Standaert, 2009) and ‘the therapeutic university’ (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). In each case, an attempt is made to perceive certain features of the university embryonically already present and capable of becoming a flourishing feature of the university.

Here, the imagination is heightened (as compared with the previous imaginings of the university). Now, the imagination is

beginning to be loosened from the actual and is striving to glimpse future possibilities while being rooted in the present. These imaginings are projections, deriving from a careful reading of the present but striding out, going on, and drawing out a future-possible from the present. These imaginings carry something in them of a yearning for the being of the authentic university. After all, being –for Heidegger at least– is only ‘being’ insofar as it has ‘being-possible’ within it.

The Dystopian University

The dystopian university represents the pessimistic imagination at work (cf Dienstag, 2006). It identifies the bleaker aspects of the emerging university and pumps them up, giving weight to them. Such depictions of the university might include ‘the soulless university’, ‘the subservient university’, ‘the selfish university’ and ‘the self-important university’. These are literally hopeless visions of the university, for they lack hope, hope that there might either continue to be redeeming features of the university in significant form or that new redeeming features of the university might yet emerge.

Such images of the university are unduly limited in another sense for these dystopias have already arrived. They merely pretend to be looking into the future when they are simply offering us insight into the emerging university; and offering us, as stated, unduly limited images of the emerging university at that. These dystopias are already with us; are already present. In virtue of their pessimism, their limited scope and their lack of hope, they should not detain us.

The Utopian University

Visions of the utopian university might include, for example, ‘the anarchic university’ (or ‘the iconoclastic university’), ‘the authentic university’, ‘the dialogical university’, ‘the ecological university’ (Barnett, 2011), ‘the chrestomathic university’ (Young, 1989), ‘the wise university’ (after Maxwell, 2008), ‘the virtuous university’ (Nixon, 2008) and ‘the theatrical university’ (Parker). Such visions of the university represent the highest form of the imagination, being imaginative ideas of the university that precisely are not present forms of the university, although in each case there are grounds for believing that each example just could be realised.

In each case, the exercise of the imagination represents a strike for freedom; and in two senses. Each vision of the university represents a break from the present; and each vision is, in its own way, reflective of a belief in a free university of some kind; in each imagining, the university is seen as free of burdens and constraints that characteristically bind the university



in the early part of the twenty-first century. Each vision breaks free of the present but also offers to return to the present, claiming implicitly that it could be realised. In Heidegger's phrase, each imagining here 'leaps ahead' but never quite severs its links with the present. It opens a gap between the real and the possible but also tacitly promises to close the gap: in the best of all possible worlds, each of these utopias might just be brought fully into the world.

Criteria of Adequacy

To call an imagined vision of the university a utopia rather than a dystopia is to confirm that it has been tested against certain standards and passed those tests. In other words, it has passed muster in the company of certain criteria of adequacy. I believe that we can point to five such criteria of adequacy:

- **Range:** What is the range of the imagining? Does it have theoretical backing? Is it rich in concepts and ideas? Does it lend itself to an array of practices? Does it have large implications for policies?
- **Depth:** What is the epistemological depth of the vision? Does it reflect or identify large structures, or acknowledge forces, that are present and does it address those structures? Does it connect with actors' experiences? Does it connect with the material world in its complexity?
- **Feasibility:** Given the power structures that it has identified, to what extent might the vision be implemented? How feasible is it? Could it be instantiated by individual universities? Could it even be instantiated by the university system as a whole?
- **Ethics:** To what degree does the vision reflect large ideas as to human and social wellbeing and even flourishing? In what ways could its vision be said to be worthwhile? Does it reflect large human principles such as those of fairness and openness?
- **Emergence:** To what extent does the vision lend itself to continuing further interpretations over time? Could it open itself to yet further ideas and imaginings? Could it continue to unfold over time, and in new ways as new situations arise?

Against these five criteria of adequacy, an imaginative vision of the utopian university can be examined as to its scope; that is, as to the extent it can be realised at the unit level (the department or subject level in an institution), at the institutional level, at the national level and at the global level. And so, in principle, a kind of matrix emerges in which the five criteria of adequacy would form one axis and the scope of

its implementation (from unit to global manifestations) would form the other axis.

In this way, the idea of a vision being brought to bear upon the 'real world' can be cashed out. It will probably turn out that some –and perhaps several or even many– of the utopian visions cannot withstand our five criteria of adequacy. Perhaps surprisingly, it may be that many of the imaginings that are found to be inadequate are so not in virtue of their feasibility (or lack of it) but rather in virtue of their range and the weakness of their emergent qualities. Or they might be found to be epistemologically shallow, having little depth, being unable to engage with the large social and ideological structures that are bound to be present.

There is a further point to note about our five criteria of adequacy. They may appear to be unduly onerous. It may be felt that they will act as early judgements on emerging ideas of the university. Far from encouraging creative thought in the forming of new ideas of the university, they may have the unintended consequence of curtailing it. But I believe the contrary to be the case. In being brought before the tribunals of our five criteria of adequacy, new ideas that are just taking shape will now be prompted as to ways in which they can be extended – in their range, their ethical character, their depth, their feasibility and so forth.

The five criteria of adequacy will be likely to act as prompts for yet more imagining and more creativity. After all, there is no limit to the number of times any new imagining might be tested against the criteria of adequacy. Hauling imaginings before these tribunals will not in itself condemn those imaginings to an early demise; more likely, the examining and the judgments of these courts will lead to a flowering of new ideas, even quite different ideas, as the components of the ideas are encouraged first in this direction and then in that direction.

The Ecological University

In these last few paragraphs, I want very sketchily to show how this tribunal might work by submitting just one of the utopian ideas of the university to it, namely that of the ecological university (Barnett, 2011). So far as its range is concerned, the idea of the ecological university can be sent to extend fully: it has theoretical backing (there being an extensive literature on the idea of the ecological), and is itself rich in concepts ('sustainability', 'ecology', 'deep ecology'). But it also has considerable implications for practices and policies. So far as its depth is concerned, it gains much of its weight precisely from a recognition of the large and deep, and ideological, structures at work; and yet is capable of being readily



meaningful to members of universities in their everyday experiences. So far as its feasibility is concerned, it could lend itself to implementation in all manner of spaces and arenas, within and beyond the university. So far as its ethical base is concerned, it wears its ethical credentials on its sleeve, taking its starting point from a concern with the other. And so far as its emergent qualities are concerned, it would be capable of being continuously extended and imagined anew, as it was taken into new settings and faced new oncoming situations. The idea of the ecological university can, therefore, be judged to be both efficacious and robust.

We should note, too, given our earlier depiction of a matrix of judgements, that the idea of the ecological university can be cashed out at all the levels of the academic world and its interactions with the wider world. The spirit of the ecological university can be cashed out at the level of the 1-1 pedagogical relationship between a tutor and a student, it can be reflected in a department's or, indeed, a university's self-understanding and its actions in the community, and it can be witnessed in the ways in which a whole university sector moves and is perceived in society. Is it a force for good, for improvement? Is it releasing or making possible new energies in society that work across the whole of society, aware of its own embeddedness in wider ecologies – of society and of persons? Or is it just a competitive system, with each university seeking only to maximise its own interests and extracting value from society instead of adding to it. The idea of the ecological university, in other words, can be seen to be potent at all the ecological registers (cf Guattari, 2005) of persons, of institutions, of communities, of society and even of the world.

Conclusions

The contemporary debate as to the idea of the university is lacking in imagination, but more than that: it is lacking in efficacious imagination. Such ideas of the university as we have for the most part lack a utopian spirit, and so are largely limited to endorsing contemporary forms of the university. And where they are utopian in spirit, they are not tested so that their substance remains unclear. Tests of adequacy can be identified which can serve to separate the conceptual goats from the conceptual sheep, so to speak; we can detect which of our imaginative ideas may really be efficacious, and be put to work in a robust way. But more than that, however, tests of adequacy may have the additional benefit of stimulating more

ideas and even serve as a prompt for imaginings of yet more feasible utopias.

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