Innovation is a buzzword with remarkable contemporary currency, one frequently instrumentalized in the constant search for new technologies, means of production, market adaptations, scientific discoveries and social changes. With its more insidious applications in mind, a number of recent academic discussions – from visual culture studies and the global art history to the history of science and media archaeology – have come to treat the paradigm with caution, even scepticism. Yet at the same time, for better or for worse, it remains implicit within the bulk of humanistic academic production. This one-day interdisciplinary conference thus confronts innovation at a crossroads. It interrogates its place within theory and praxis by asking: How are we best to approach and define innovation in contemporary academic discourses? Is the paradigm purely a means of disarming social pressure for an all-inclusive equalized prosperity; or might it be recuperated to provide a stimulus for sustainable growth? Can we understand innovation in a broader global spectrum without falling into the trap of cultural essentialism; or does this concept perpetuate Western-centric views and mores? Can the concept of innovation be used for the analysis of historical periods; or does it figure too easily in teleological narratives?