

The Posthumanist University

A Review of Thomas Docherty, *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution*. London: Bloomsbury, 2011, 198 pp, £19.99.

ISBN 978-1-84966-615-2.

Stefan Herbrechter

Coventry University, UK
E-mail: aa7837@coventry.ac.uk

The higher-ed business is in for a lot of pain as a new era of creative destruction produces a merciless shakeout of those institutions that adapt and prosper from those that stall and die. Meanwhile, students themselves are in for a golden age, characterized by near-universal access to the highest quality teaching and scholarship at minimal cost. The changes ahead will ultimately bring about the most beneficial, most efficient and most equitable access to education that the world has ever seen. There is much to be gained. We may lose the gothic arches, the bespectacled lecturers, dusty books lining the walls of labyrinthine libraries – wonderful images from higher education’s past. But nostalgia won’t stop the unsentimental beast of progress from wreaking havoc on old ways of doing things. If a faster, cheaper way of sharing information emerges, history shows us that it will quickly supplant what came before. People will not continue to pay tens of thousands of dollars for what technology allows them to get for free.¹

Thomas Docherty’s admirable book, *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution*, does not address this latest attack, outlined above, on the institution of the university, namely its “virtualization”. However, Docherty will be known to readers of the weekly *Times Higher Education* (THE) as a regular commentator on current higher education affairs. Recently, he contributed an article on “Globalisation and Its Discontents” (subtitle: scholarship has long been international but the current vision of a “worldwide” academy of rootless student-consumers and national economic competition is as contradictory as it is immoral...)² Here, as in the book, Docherty combines the clinical assessment and refreshing critique of the blatant “nonsense” that has been happening, mainly in the UK and the US, but thanks to neoliberal globalisation, also increasingly in universities worldwide. This nonsense that in the UK started with Thatcherism, but which has hijacked the “world economy” for the last three decades, is simply referred to by Docherty as “the modernising rush”:

Globalisation, of course, is not global; it is experienced differently in Adelaide and Accra; it feels different on the sofa of a World Bank office to on a Washington park bench. Moreover, globalisation is not new, even for the university: it has assumed variant forms for well over thousand years.³

¹ Nathan Harden, “The End of the University As We Know It,” *The American Interest* (“Virtualized – The End of the University As We Know It”) 8.3 Winter (January/February 2013): 56.

² Thomas Docherty, “Globalisation and Its Discontents,” *Times Higher Education*, January 17, 2013, 41-43.

³ Docherty, “Globalisation,” 42.

This is a good example of Docherty's no-frills style and his call to "common sense", namely that the university should return to its real business: "Our place is to critique and to call conformities into question, not to endorse unexamined norms set by others".⁴ The fact that universities have entered an unholy alliance with business and politics relates to a general "crisis in democracy". Hence Docherty's call for the university to remember that

...one of its central civilizational functions [is] to enable more people to engage in reasoned debate, in a polyglot House of Wisdom, democratically open. The contemporary version of university globalisation, however, does not seem to centre itself on widened participation in democratic politics, or even on the relation of the university to the civic polity.⁵

This, however, is precisely where the new lobby that advocates the virtualisation of the institution would come charging in by claiming that we indeed need more, namely virtual, neoliberalisation, not less. In any case, resistance is futile, the nice elitist place Docherty is defending is about to be steamrollered into oblivion by the great leveller called "technological progress", which comes today in the clothes of new media but still resembles uncannily the cynical, conductorless and unstoppable train of progress at the end of Zola's naturalist novel *La Bête humaine* (1890):

Qu'importaient les victimes que la machine écrasait en chemin! N'allait-elle pas quand même à l'avenir, insoucieuse du sang répandu? Sans conducteur, au milieu des ténèbres, en bête aveugle et sourde, elle roulait, chargée de cette chair à canon, de ces soldats, déjà hébétés de fatigue, et ivres, qui chantaient.⁶

The state and future of the university in the age of neoliberal globalisation and technocultural change has itself become quite a prolific genre in the last decades, but arguably the one book that really relaunched the debate was Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins* (1996) to which Docherty is also heavily indebted.⁷ Readings explained why the idea of an institution with universal ambitions and humanistic ideals (the "modern university of culture") should have such a hard time in the "posthumanist" or even "posthuman" age of globalisation and global culture. As Readings's analysis persuasively argued, the withering away of the nationstate in the context of an "Americanized" globalisation has led to a crisis of the university because the notion of culture as the legitimating force behind the modern university has reached the end of its "usefulness". The loss of (national-hegemonic) culture is perceived as a deligitimating threat especially in the humanities. The current thoroughly managerialised and corporatised university no longer participates in the humanistic project which plunges the entire canon of humanistic values into deep crisis. Instead the "post-historical" (or post-ideological) university witnesses the end of the classical liberal education based on the German, Humboldtian, model, with its principles of the autonomy of knowledge, Kantian critique, Enlightenment reason and the Cartesian subject. The change is evident for example in the shift from the professor to the administrator as the central figure in the new, corporate, university. There is no longer any centred (or unified) subject who could feel addressed by the traditional narrative of liberal education; instead students

⁴ Docherty, "Globalisation," 42.

⁵ Docherty, "Globalisation," 43.

⁶ Émile Zola, *Le Bête humaine* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1972), 382.

⁷ Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

and increasingly teachers as well, in their postmodern environment, construct their identities from the sum of their roles and experiences and are thus better understood, following Deleuze and Guattari, as either “rhizomes”, “haecceities”, or indeed “networked individuals”. The anti-universalist liberation and the anti-humanist theory movements of the second half of the 20th century have shown that the universal liberal and rational subject was in fact always inhabited (and split) by other categories like gender, race, class and, as highlighted by recent posthumanist or postanthropocentric approaches, by human “speciesism” or unfounded exceptionalism.

The victory of global neoliberal capitalism has thus profoundly changed the institution of the university. Students now understand themselves as consumers, and degrees have become commodities (that help to increase the individual’s social, cultural and economic capital). From the modern model of the university of culture (whose main aim was to prepare a supposedly free individual to play his or her part in the dialectic of national homogeneity and universalist idealism) we have moved to the neoliberal university of “excellence”. Excellence is “post-ideologically” defined because it is a void concept not tied to any specific referent – it is “dereferentialised”.

Readings’s analysis is as pertinent as it was almost twenty years ago. It is becoming increasingly clear that the ongoing struggle over globalisation is mainly an ideological one. How else could one explain that, at the time when there is a consolidated global economic hegemony with its legitimating neoliberal economic ideology that impregnates everything from everyday life practice to social institutions and the media, the emphasis in public discourse is put on cultural difference, on particularism and the local (or indeed “glocal”), on “clashes of civilisations” and “global terror”, which all serve to prevent an urgent argument about a possible renewal of universalism (in the face of “big questions” like ethics, human and animal rights, ecology, biotechnology etc.). It cannot be a mere coincidence that the humanist ideals of the university are abandoned at the time when the very notion of “humanity” is in crisis – a process denounced from conservative defenders of “human nature” and hailed by post- or transhuman technophile futurists who are in favour of accelerated “human cyborgisation”?

Neither cultural conservatives nor technoenthusiasts, however, appear to want to address the renewed question of technology by rethinking the role of science within “global technoscientific capitalism” and its utilitarian ideology. It is again no coincidence that the eternal question: what is the “use” of...? hits the arts and humanities hardest, while it seems considerably less threatening a question for social and other sciences. Combined with an ever more ruthless managerialism, which only understands knowledge production in terms of commodification (i.e. use value and surplus, or “excellence”), the humanities have been fighting for their survival. However, is it not curious that at the very moment when society becomes a so-called “knowledge society” and knowledge becomes the most sought after commodity, that universities are seen to be creating new hierarchies of knowledge (according to a utilitarian logic) and are phasing out speculative research and academic freedom. While all these developments seem to lead to the disruption of the community of knowledge(s), Readings already argued that they may also be regarded as a chance. He proposed a flight forward so to speak towards the creation of a “community of dissensus”, subject to (ethical) accountability but not to (managerial) accounting. The focus should be on the creation of temporary structures (“centres”) for interdisciplinary work, and teaching should be reclaimed as a site of “obligation” – a utopia which still awaits its implementation.

It is no secret that the crisis of the “idea” of the university has always been, first of all, a crisis of the humanities. But where if not in the humanities should the resistance to the current, ruthlessly utilitarian regime, which has literally “taken possession” of society as a whole, and which has less and less patience for the idea of “humanity” and the “humanities”, come from? And where should the coming post-individual, post-subjective and post-humanist “singularity” might acquire his or her (or maybe “its”) “self”-reflective and critical abilities, which will undoubtedly become even more not less crucial for any future “posthuman” societies (i.e. societies which have definitively distanced themselves from ideas like humanity, cosmopolitanism, liberal democracy, etc.)? Unless, of course, the posthuman (eagerly proclaimed by some or vilified by others) merely means “less than human” or “dehumanized”?

So, almost twenty years after Readings’s analysis, Docherty’s book is a timely reminder that the problem indeed hasn’t gone away or it hasn’t even been adequately addressed. The additional timeliness of Docherty’s book is given to it by the global financial crisis that neoliberal capitalism finds itself in today. Docherty calls the decision of the current Liberal-Conservative coalition government to withdraw all state funding for “non-essential” subjects, i.e. arts, humanities, social sciences, from UK universities “an attack on the fundamental principle that the University exists as a key constituent in a public sphere” (viii). His professed aim is to revive “the very possibility of our establishing a viable future for the University” (ix). In the introduction he attempts to reverse the climate of distrust towards the university that has been reigning since Thatcherism, and which was further boosted by rampant anti-intellectualism in the popular media and underpinned by the already mentioned managerialism with its “audit culture” and student consumerism. He proposes a return to “the University of the Idea: the University is where we can figure out the future in terms of imagining possibilities through the making of an idea” (3). As such, *being for* the university is promoting a radically open politics, democracy and alternative futures of the ways in which humans must live together sustainably and ethically. Docherty thus advocates a return to “student learning” instead of “student experience”, and to “the search for that which we call true (in science), for that which we call good (in social science) and for that which we call beautiful (in aesthetics, arts and humanities)”, and through which “we practise this fundamental activity of extending freedom in just democracy” (4). Against the conservative and undemocratic neoliberal “rights” approach for student-customers he sets the need for a university education to be “transformative” and open-ended, instead of “modularised” and “safe”. He chastises the lack of true dialogical and democratic leadership in universities, the unhealthy move from examination to continuous assessment, and the market ideology that has turned universities basically into diploma factories, subservient to government policies and “business demand”. Instead of demanding “value-for-money” in a liberalised “market” where universities compete for student customers, the challenge for the “university of the idea” that Docherty advocates, will be “how we will find money-for-values” (7).

In the following chapters, Docherty takes up each of these points in detail by historically analysing how the university was systematically destroyed as an institution and why it needs to be “reimagined”. In “The University of the Idea” Docherty elaborates on his claim why the university has to be seen as an “extension of freedom, the progressive pursuit of human possibilities, edification” (18). Against the “vacuity of information”, the university needs to promote “the more difficult – and often aesthetically judged – matter of knowledge” (20). The university has “the ostensibly paradoxical responsibility to *extend the field of what we do not know*, in order to extend

the possibilities of human consciousness, human thinking and action as we strive to engage with and deal with the resulting ignorance” (20). The greatest threat the university is facing lies in “the banality of blandness” as it becomes the “serving agent of the government of the day” (23), and in the “provinciality and insularities of bureaucratic reason that have left us in the position of being governed by bureaucracy that is coercive and carceral” (35). The massification of university education and the increasing diversity of students do not automatically have to lead to the current administered “banalisation” of the student “experience” – Docherty’s main target in chapter 2. The quite ironic result of the obsession with “quality assurance” in recent times has been a turn “away from *actual* learning and teaching – activities full of real content, full of the content of thinking and of intellectual work – towards an endless monitoring of the *processes* through which we monitor how it is that we *can be assured* that we are learning, and how it is that we *know for sure* that we are teaching” (37). Everybody who has been asked to come up with “module descriptors” or “predicted learning outcomes” will probably agree that these are either an insurance policy or a purely administrative hoop one has to jump through. In any case they bear no resemblance whatsoever to actual teaching and learning, which is spontaneous, dialogic and, necessarily, to a great extent unpredictable. If these administrative descriptors were to be applied literally they would result in the most uneventful and unexciting, safe and “mechanical” or instrumentalised teaching – which is in fact what the “skills agenda” seems to advocate: predictability, “transferability” (pure “technique”), teaching as pure mediation. If this were all that teaching and learning are about it would be more efficient to ask machines to perform it, or, indeed, to invest in MOOC factories. As Docherty rightly points out, this form of predictable teaching can only be called “authoritarian” and “totalitarian” because it encourages dependency, is unholistic or compartmentalized, encourages a purely consumptive attitude for nicely packaged “information”, discourages autonomous thinking and is averse to future risk-taking. In this sense, Docherty rightly claims that “there simply is no such thing as ‘knowledge-transfer’” and “there is no such thing as a kind of ‘module’ that ‘contains’ the knowledge that we can either teach or learn” (41). Pure transmission without transformation is precisely one of the major aspects of the forgetting of the university, or its “posthumanisation”, as outlined above. It is a forgetting of the “materiality” of learning and teaching (44) and the importance of the imagination as central component in what should be a life transforming “experience”. The kind of “critical thinking” that an actual learning experience should produce is eminently transformative in a political sense: “The question of learning and teaching is really a matter of a battle... for the future control of our bodies and thereby for the future ways in which we will occupy and relate to each other and to our environment or ecology” (49). Learning and teaching thus understood as a “liberation” must necessarily look “dangerous” for purely conservative economic lobbies – like the ones that seem to have taken hold of and done away with the “university of the idea” or even the “idea of the university” in recent decades. No wonder this has to be policed through endless processes of “quality assurance” and submitted to further fragmentation and alienation by modularisation and consumption. In fact, universities today, Docherty explains, are run like “theme-parks” with their focus on sanitized student “experience” and, as a result, have become “a mere extension of the ‘culture industry’” (60-1). The “mantra of choice” and the “triumph of efficiency”, meanwhile, have made an actual meaningful student experience virtually impossible. What is being encouraged through the idea of “customer choice” and the “marketization” of university “content” is conformity – in endless variations of course,

none of which, however, promote autonomy, liberation, free or radical thinking and fundamental questioning.

Similar trends are at work in research (chapter 3 “A Terrifying Silence: Spaces of Research from Discovery to Surveillance”). Institutional politics at universities, so Docherty claims, are based on the idea of “managed space” – “finding more cost-efficient ways of *exploiting* our space, place and identities” (71). This rarification and commodification of space goes against the very idea of a university (and its underlying spatial metaphor):

[S]pace is more than money: it is possibility, imagination, opportunity. Research, in fact, is and should fundamentally be about a certain spatial expansion or expansiveness: generosity is the moral term that we should use to describe this, the generosity that is marked by a hospitality towards the new, towards the foreign and the strange unknown. (72)

Needless to say that the managed forms of research, or even worse “applied research” and the funding practices attached to the idea of “impact”, go entirely in the opposite direction. What indeed is the function of university research within the contemporary public sphere? It is either commercial or military and often both, since we live in times of “global terror” or the “era of suspicion”. As surveillance has become our major “survival technique”, all research that is not goal-directed and economically viable is potentially suspect. If you cannot explain what it is “for”, research might actually be “against” (“us”)... However “if truth is now elusive, and thereby no longer easily assured or guaranteed thanks to our understanding of space and of our perhaps less significant place in the universe, then it becomes all the more necessary that we research, in more fundamentally imaginative ‘blue-skies’ ways, to try and find it; or, at least, to find ways of imagining – even building – a world in which we can live with the resulting uncertainties” (76). What is currently happening in universities, which are increasingly afraid of “uncontrolled” space (space-management) and of the uncontrollable “future” (time-management), is rather the opposite: “it is not simply that we have tended to prioritize so-called ‘applied’ research; it is rather that the research has forgotten its primary aims of searching imaginatively for justice and for democratic freedom” (85). Furthermore, in separating research from teaching and learning, current policy and practice is further alienating universities from their main purpose, which is to help people to transcend their own boundaries and encourage them to imagine and to build alternative, more just and more sustainable futures. Docherty’s analogy is helpful here:

Knowledge-transfer is a bit like taking a journey on the Underground or metro system: at various points, you can make a connection; but the specific connections we make are unimportant, for all we are doing is simply moving about in controlled space. Research, properly understood, would get us out of the controlled space underground for a bit of real exploration of the great city above. (95)

The second series of Docherty’s attacks on current malpractice in universities concern leadership, assessment and finance. Against the prevailing managerial authoritarianism Docherty places “a version of authority whose purpose is to give authorization to the views and thinking of others, or to bring them to the point where their voice is legitimate; and it is only this latter that can be called education” (97). Docherty’s idea of true leadership is inspired by the “custodianship” the (Heideggerian) poet has over language and living tradition – both vital for the survival of imagination

and liberatory experience (rather than empty formulas like “modernization” or the vacuity of “excellence”). Instead of leaders, Docherty points out, “we have managers; instead of followers, we have resources” (111). The noxious effects of a blind managerialism in contemporary universities, which are not only run *like* businesses but increasingly are thought to *be* businesses, and its associated “market forces” is that “these forces do not exist in order to extend civic freedom or democracy; rather, they exist in order to reduce the content of freedom and justice to matters of consumerist ‘choice’ and ‘value for money’” (115). The dehumanisation of the “workforce” into “human resources” is an important associated aspect of the posthumanisation of the university and the deligitimation of true leadership into pure managerialism.

Assessment – or “controlling conformity” in Docherty’s view – is a further reflection of the move away from critical knowledge to the “management of information” in learning and teaching. In principle, there is of course nothing wrong with the idea of assessment – and nobody probably would want to go back to the rather blunt and often arbitrary instrument of punctual assessment by examination. However, the excessively bureaucratised process of assessment that currently dominates in universities is limiting for the student and demeaning for the assessor – whose professional judgement apparently can no longer be trusted while she or he has to be subjected himself or herself to constant “peer review”, assessment of assessment (second, blind, external etc. marking) and bureaucratic control (benchmarks, marking consistency measurements etc.). Current forms of assessment are also bad news for students in the end, because they are less about the evaluation of quality and qualification than about “quantification” and measurement (from word counts to formulaic learning outcomes). Assessment becomes more or less a tick-box exercise where “content accuracy” and “information scope” is checked against “transparent” marking criteria. The trend here as well is moving towards automation or even more cynically “self-assessment”. In any case, the “human” and transformational learning experience effect that would make testing meaningful is increasingly being phased out, and replaced by “posthuman(ist)” assessment. It is an open secret that marks below the mystical II.1 classification (which allows for further study and proves that your work has been deemed academically valuable) actually not only signify a waste of time but also a waste of money – or, study fees badly invested. No wonder the inflation of marks has become such a problem, since customers want to be satisfied and student satisfaction drives the university business. Docherty describes the reigning collusion and cynicism of the system thus: “In assessment, we are in a position where nobody judges, in fact; and this is a perfect description of a bureaucracy. We have established instead a system, based purely and simply on a crude logic of mercenary exchange – marks are money, remember – and the task of the examiner, and the student likewise, is to preserve the sanctity of the system itself” (148). Instead, Docherty argues for a rehabilitation of assessment “that enables a student to engage more deeply... with their field of study... an assessment that is grounded in the legitimization of our students’ authorities... [which will help us to produce an outcome] where democracy and freedom can be extended, and where assessment becomes, genuinely, a matter of radical empowerment” (155-6).

Last, but most importantly, Docherty tackles the current finance regime of universities:

The financial starving of the University sector worldwide is not in any sense a natural state of affairs but it is a matter of ideological preference. That preference is the expression of a

conservative political will that fears the extension of freedom and the demand for justice; moreover, it is a will that knows that such principles have their roots in the University properly understood (157).

In fact, increasingly, universities have become individual states' cash-cows – money “invested” in university businesses has been yielding quite a substantial return for “UKHE plc.” – an argument that was made during the recent shake-up of immigration policies – thanks to its intake of international fee-paying students. In the light of the recent global financial crisis, however, Docherty argues that this is the time to ditch the “production model of efficient ‘quality assurance’ regarding consistency in ‘outcomes’ or output” (162) and replace it with a model that addresses “the present condition of our societies”. Instead of “putting consumerist choice in the hands of individual students-to-be” and holding this up as a model to improve the “quality” of higher education in the age of “self-financing” and the “true cost” of student fees of nearly £10,000 a year – a system where “the vice chancellor is driven by the choices of school pupils” (165) – the university of the future “should not be modelled on the socio-political foundations of a mid-nineteenth-century industry [model]... if we embrace modernization, we reject fees” (170). The case Docherty makes, instead of fees, is for progressive taxation as a better means of redistribution and widening participation. Needless to say that this would be hugely unpopular in a (neo)liberal societal context that sees investment in education as a predominantly individual (and of course exclusively financial) “benefit”. However, to defend “a university of the idea” in Docherty’s sense a political will is needed that sees public investment in universities as the only way of guaranteeing democratic freedom – “if you think education is expensive, then you should try ignorance” (168) as Docherty reminds us. Reviving this political will has to come from the people working in the universities and from the people who have benefited from them in order to reverse the consequences of neoliberal depoliticisation. Politics, as Docherty says,

is there axiomatically and by definition in order to combat the kinds of negativity [the individualism and greed promoted by a ‘free-market’ ideology] that will alienate us from the polis, from the public sphere. Politics, as the very word suggests, is that activity that binds us in a polis and that combats atomized isolation from the community as a whole... It is time to exercise a political will *for the University*. (184-5)

Even though Docherty’s book argues for the *university*, I would contend that his main addressee remain the humanities. The survival of the humanities – the core of the “idea of the university” and arguably the main bearer of the “university of the idea” – has never been less certain. As Docherty mentions, the Cameron-Clegg government has decided to cut all state funding for the arts and humanities (and the social sciences, too). “Cultivating our humanity” has therefore just received a new price-tag of a minimum of £30,000 (up from around £10,000) for an undergraduate degree, plus living costs, not to speak of any additional costs for an MA or PhD (“pursuing a Ph.D. in the liberal arts is one of the riskiest career moves one could make today!”⁸ Humanities programmes and departments will thus have to make an even stronger “business case” if they want to survive. But maybe it’ll be possible to “outsource” cultivating our humanity to private providers, or maybe the big virtual university on the world wide web will be able to install a humanity programme for free (or a notional fee) in the form of an “educational

⁸ Harden, “The End of the University,” 62.

amalgam of YouTube, Wikipedia and Facebook”.⁹ So, nobody working in the humanities (or social sciences) at a university today can really afford to ignore Docherty’s message and virtually everyone will agree with his analysis. However, there is one major concern – how to avoid that Docherty’s argument will be seen as “nostalgic” or “elitist”, “unrealistic” too “idealistic” or simply “irrelevant” – given that most of its principles were already in place when Readings wrote about the university in ruins?

This is, to conclude, where I’d like to evoke another recent, equally impassioned but more “affirmative” and maybe more “constructive” plea for the humanities “in the times of the posthuman”: Rosi Braidotti’s *The Posthuman*.¹⁰ Docherty’s list of ills that have befallen the university, and the humanities in particular, is widely shared and accepted. What is maybe less clear is what should be done about the situation. There is also in Braidotti’s book the hope for a return, even if critical, of course, to the very “idea” and the ethico-political core of the institution. Or a reinscription of its fundamental, humanist, values for our time – an admirable and worthy project, which, however, is facing not only economic and political resistance from the outside so to speak, but, increasingly, also from the “inside”. The question of relevance regarding the humanities is not only asked by its enemies but also, increasingly, by people who find working in “the arts, humanities and social sciences” too constraining. Often this goes well beyond traditional ideas of interdisciplinarity and, instead, looks for alliances between the new life sciences, media studies and core arts and humanities or social science disciplines.¹¹ So, there are people who want to “blow up the humanities”¹² because they’re seen as a conceptual limitation with regard to the new “posthumanist” or “postanthropocentric” context. Questions like global climate change and sustainable development, biodiversity, biopolitics and eugenics, artificial intelligence, new media and the future relationship between human and nonhuman actors will certainly need a critical theoretical or philosophical input, but they can only be realistically tackled by a new alliance between the sciences, the arts and humanities and social sciences – and this does not only need to be reflected in research, but also in learning and teaching. “How could the humanities not be affected by the posthuman condition”, which is characterised by the “explosion of humanism” and the “implosion of anthropocentrism”, Braidotti asks.¹³ Only fundamentally transformed humanities – and hence also a different kind of university, one that doesn’t fight rear-guard battles but instead embraces the new challenges posed by the posthuman(ist) or postanthropocentric world view – can hope to remain “relevant” in the 21st century and beyond. Braidotti calls these emerging interdisciplinary structures “a clear institutional response to the inhuman(e) structures of our times”¹⁴:

⁹ Harden, “The End of the University,” 57.

¹⁰ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). See also my review, Stefan Herbrechter “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence... Or, What’s Left of the Humanities?,” *Culture Machine Reviews* 2013, <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/495/516>.

¹¹ See for example the kind of work that is being published by Cary Wolfe’s “Posthumanities” series at Minnesota, <http://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/series/posthumanities>, or the “Living Books About Life” series directed by Gary Hall, <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/digitisation/econtent11/livibl.aspx>.

¹² Cf. Toby Miller, *Blow Up the Humanities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

¹³ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 143.

¹⁴ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 147.

instead of turning backwards to a nostalgic vision of the Humanities as the repository and the executors of universal transcendental reason and inherent moral goodness, I propose to move forward into multiple posthuman futures. We need an active effort to reinvent the academic field of the Humanities in a new global context and to develop an ethical framework worthy of our posthuman times. Affirmation, not nostalgia, is the road to pursue: not the idealization of philosophical meta-discourse, but the more pragmatic task of self-transformation through humble experimentation.¹⁵

I don't believe Docherty's and Braidotti's vision for the humanities of tomorrow are incompatible. However, the challenge will be to find a way of reconciling the historical task of the humanities – keeping the critical tradition alive, and hence providing the substance for the radical imagination of alternative democratic futures – with its new programme of affirmation and the associated challenges to its most fundamental methodologies, through new alliances with the sciences.

References

1. Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
2. Docherty, Thomas. "Globalisation and Its Discontents." *Times Higher Education*, January 17, 2013, 41-43.
3. Docherty, Thomas. *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution*. London: Bloomsbury, 2011.
4. Harden, Nathan. "The End of the University As We Know It." *The American Interest* ("Virtualized – The End of the University As We Know It") 8, no. 3 Winter (January/February 2013): 55-62.
5. Herbrechter, Stefan. "The Roar on the Other Side of Silence... Or, What's Left of the Humanities?." *Culture Machine Reviews* 2013. <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/495/516>.
6. Miller, Toby. *Blow Up the Humanities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.
7. Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
8. Zola, Emile. *Le Bête humaine*. Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1972.

¹⁵ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 150.