

## **Futuring the University**

### **Author**

Fry, Tony

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Tony Fry

## Futuring the University

**Abstract:** This article reviews two of the most influential critical positions on the future of the late modern university. The first critique is based on Bill Readings' acclaimed book, "The University in Ruins", and the second on Jacques Derrida's writing on the university, in particular, his essay "The University Without Condition." The article sets out to make clear the insufficiency of these positions in the face of contemporary unsustainable circumstances. Specifically, it presents the case for thinking and developing far more radical perspectives able to start to redirect university education toward a new culture of learning, i.e., a culture wherein the university serves to advance sustainable futures rather than upholding the status quo.

**Keywords:** university, sustainable future, culture of learning, Bill Readings, Jacques Derrida, urmadic university

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Essay

Tony Fry, Ph.D., Griffith University, Queensland College of Art, PO Box 3370, South Bank Qld 4101, Australia; e-mail: t.fry@griffith.edu.au

From where I stand, and looking to the East and West, two possible futures of the university can be contemplated: It can continue on its current trend of instrumentalist and numerical growth accompanied by intellectual degeneration, or it can begin a process of institutional re-creation in response to "the state of the world". To support the latter position and demonstrate the insufficiency of internal institutional reform, two influential critical positions on the late modern university will be reviewed and contrasted with a more radical perspective. The first critique comes from Bill Readings, the second from Jacques Derrida.

### Among the Ruins

Bill Readings first coined the expression "university in ruins" in an article in "The Oxford Literary Review" in 1995, the year before the book of the same title appeared. While the book has acquired seminal status as a radical critique, this assessment, at a fundamental level, is misplaced. Certainly one can agree with much of what Readings (1996, p. 11) had to say, not least on the university's slide into corporate managed consumerism wherein instrumental interests of the status quo continually win out over the advance of humanist knowledge. Such a slide is now complete and produces vast numbers of students antithetical to critical enquiry and learning. So often such students judge their education by the norms of a "consumer culture." Readings also pointed out that the university is now replete with languages of "evacuated content". To make his point, he used the example of *excellence*, a term now emptied of any grounded meaning (ibid., p. 18).<sup>1</sup> *Excellence* likewise is also part of the language of the "consumer culture," wherein it marks "capital logic," infusing the linguistic behavior of everyday life (ibid., p. 175).

The problem with Readings is not that his critique was wrong, but rather that it was circumscribed by institutional introspection. It was a lament firmly anchored

<sup>1</sup> Excellence sits alongside many terms (such as "identity," "sustainability," and "knowledge economy") that expose a total disconnection from any kind of "real" referent.

in the institution. His largely inward-looking perspective lacked recognition of a growing worldly demand for radically new and futural kinds of knowledge. His acknowledgement that the institution had lost its "national cultural mission" did not lead him to acknowledge or accept that an even greater mission was waiting on the horizon (*ibid.*, p. 3).

Readings' internalism, his resignation of life lived in the ruins, partnered with a desire for the reinvigoration of conservative humanism: "The current crisis of the university in the West proceeds from a fundamental shift in its social role and the internal systems, one which means that the centrality of the traditional humanistic disciplines to the life of the University is no longer assured." (*Ibid.*, p. 3)

One could say much about the practical and financial problems from which universities suffer, but their problems are far more fundamental. They include living with the consequence of humanism as a failed project (after Foucault, one can say it was not humane enough) and with the sciences as they have become stunted and embedded in an instrumental essentialism – a condition that blocks acknowledging higher orders of complexity (wherein understanding arises out of exposing the limits of a *faith* in knowledge and reason). The combination of the loss of the intellectual driving force of the Enlightenment and a more recent succumbing to market forces has precipitated a substantial destruction of a culture of knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Readings offered up Cultural Studies, bolstered by deconstruction, as a progressive domain in the creation of institutional change (*ibid.*, p. 17). This was an overoptimistic position. In the decade and a half that has passed since he argued his case, Cultural Studies has gone nowhere. In fact, it has drifted deeper into popularism and the marketplace as a content supplier to mainstream "creative industries" (*ibid.*, p. 121). Certainly, Cultural Studies no longer offers the way to think the university (Grossberg et al., pp. 72–82).<sup>3</sup> More generally, Readings (1996, pp. 9–10) recognized that the project of the university as a bringer into being of "the liberal subject" is over. Yet as a liberal, he celebrated a pluralism that negates any singular mission. A choice now becomes stark – life in the ruins of the university for evermore (Readings choice), or adopting a single mission, the remaking of the university to confront the problems of a world in danger of becoming a ruin (the choice to be made here) (*ibid.*, p. 127).<sup>4</sup> Tragically, Readings' early death prevented him perhaps revising his position in a world now more critically poised.

Unsurprisingly, Derrida presents a different picture of the university than Readings. What he does is to recast the Kantian vision of the university of reason as an idealized futural projection. To make this clear, we will draw on two texts, starting with Derrida's remarks on the "principle of reason" in the "Eyes of the

<sup>2</sup> Unquestionably, the Enlightenment played a major role in the formation of the modern mind as it informed action in the world. This perspective was encapsulated in the words of Francis Bacon in his "New Atlantis" of 1626, where he expressed his ambition as to 'endow the life of man with infinite commodities'.

<sup>3</sup> As Fry argued in Grossberg (1988) in fact its radicalism was always mostly a sham.

<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically Readings gave up on the university having an ethical project while advocating pedagogy and ethical practice based on a displacement of teaching by a far more fundamental fusion between learning and being.

University" (2004) and his "The University Without Condition" that appeared in the "Without Alibi" collection (2002). Both texts deposit unresolved problems and raise unavoidable issues.

### Deconstructive Idealism

Derrida asked and explored a key question: For what reason does the university exist today? In so doing, he confronted a fundamental issue – the relation of the university to reason. Central to the task was his direct engagement of "the principle of reason" (e.g., "nothing is without reason") formulated by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, as it underscored Immanuel Kant's view that the university should be governed by the idea of reason. Derrida (2004, pp. 135–139) brought this notion to a contemporary perspective via Heidegger's assertion that the university is "grounded" on the principle of reason.

Two qualifications now follow. First, reason is not presented via "the principle" as a posited quality (for it arrives as a mode of making present that directs how what is present is seen and understood). The second qualification returns us to Readings and undercuts the *telos* he presented (in which the university progressed through three directive ideas – reason, culture, and excellence – all as legitimizing referents). Reason has never been fully displaced, while culture and excellence (in its vacuousness) failed to arrive with equal agency.

As Derrida discovered (via Heidegger), accounting for the "university of reason" by reason, based on the "principle of reason," creates an endless circling. Thus, rather than reason being a "ground," it is exposed as a void, as the "principle of reason" actually says nothing "about reason itself" (*ibid.*, pp. 135–137). The problematic of the university governed by reason thus folds into a void in which the questions of reason (such as "Is it rational?" and "Does the university stand upon reason?") can never actually arrive (*ibid.* p. 135).

Hereafter, the issue of the "principle of reason" as a "making present" – and thus mere representation – haunts and perplexes Derrida: "Nowhere, within the university as such, is anyone wondering from where that call (*Anspruch*) of reason is voiced, nowhere is anyone inquiring into the origins of that demand for grounds, for reason that is to be provided, rendered, delivered." (*Ibid.*, p. 140)

The university of reason simply floats in the void, "invisible and unthought," with instrumentalism becoming naturalized as "practical reason" in its most diminished form.<sup>5</sup> In this setting, the lack of critical reflection is most evident

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant in the division of knowledge of his "The Conflict of the Faculties" placed the instrumental nature of the work of the university (in law, medicine, and theology) – as it was specifically directed at serving the utility of the needs of government – above the evaluative lower faculties of rational knowledge independent of government (which included philosophy and pure mathematics) as well as historical knowledge and the natural sciences. So more generally, as government, the state, and industrialisation all developed and expanded, the utilitarian demands upon the university grew. The current dominance of disciplines and quasi-disciplines (like tourism studies, marketing, and creative industries), with their instrumental economic agendas, serve the goals of governmental and the economy. As such, they are an extension of the Kantian division of knowledge as it has marginalised

in the institution's failure to interrogate and critically revitalize its curriculum and displace functionalistic teaching (and evaluation) within an informed and situated condition of learning framed by, as Keith Jenkins (2009) makes clear, a transformed understanding of history. Faith in reason is a blink of the eye unable to see reason's insufficiency – it cannot unmask itself, free itself from “end-orientation,” or deliver and lead futural thinking. Above all, as Derrida (2004, p. 148) shows, faith in reason, cannot dislodge reason from the defuturing status quo. There has to be something more, and as Georges Bataille said in numerous ways, there is. Contra to Readings, there has to be a new project.

The university now exists in a world of growing geo-environmental and geopolitical dangers (not least for us). This stridently suggests that the university needs to reshape what it does, how it does it, and why.

One needs to realize that the arrival of climate change, the need to feed an ever-increasing global population, natural resources under stress from unchecked demand powered by hyperconsumption, a global economy of increasing inequity teetering on dysfunction, and the prospect of growth in asymmetrical conflict are actually not the problem. Rather, the problem is the failure to see that these problems are all relationally connected and constitute a singularity of which there is no representational surrogate. This is to say, while these problems in sum, as a relational whole, cannot currently be represented, they have to be evoked as a picture. There can be no solution that is not relational.

The division of knowledge that came from the Enlightenment and was projected through modernity produced the myopic essence of the instrumental. As a result, reason within metaphysics became significantly absorbed into technology and thus into the unlimited expansion of techno-science – which now stands for an unthinking thinking (ibid., pp. 142–143).

Derrida draws a line linking thinkers from Kant and Schelling to Heidegger to assert that “the essential feature of academic responsibility must not be professional education” but a “new thinking” (ibid., p. 151). Such thinking requires “both the principle of reason and what is beyond the principle of reason” (ibid., p. 153). It requires another kind of conversation, writing, and acting all beyond reason. By implication, Derrida's call places one constituency (*progressives*) in a conflict with another constituency (reformist of the status quo) over the form of human futures. By implication, it casts doubt on the idea of “working in the ruins” as a viable and useful way of responsibly living in the university.

Rather than viewing ruins, Derrida saw the university, in its becoming, as an event that surprises, that suspends comprehension (an event “that I do not comprehend,” (Derrida 2003, p. 90))<sup>6</sup>, but one of total academic freedom that governs itself by rules that it itself has defined. These rules enable it to act with complete self-determination in both thought and action. In contradiction, this nondeterminist institution only arrives via determinate action. Effectively what Derrida provocatively does is to reaffirm the Enlightenment project, and the

university within it, in order to reinstate the institution's default position. But in the face of a condition of global unsustainability – evidenced demographically, climatically, and terrestrially in inequity and conflict – such freedom is an inappropriate indulgence. For humanity at large to have a viable future, there must be an intellectual project with an enormous momentum able to redirect the forms of “world making” toward establishing “conditions of sustainment.”

Whereas the Enlightenment directly and indirectly brought the modern world into existence, the “project of sustainment” names and addresses the defuturing nature of the made world-within-the-world of human creation. As such, it is a project that recognizes the finitude of our being-in-time and that begs to be directive of the future form of the university. In arriving in the afterlife of the Enlightenment, it nonetheless echoes its spirit. Remembering Kant's opening to his essay “What is Enlightenment?,” a project centered on *Sapere aude!* (Dare to know), “the imperative to know what must be discovered” is claimed as the underpinning of academic freedom. But now, in our age, a general quest for knowledge has to be displaced by “the need to gain knowledge that allows us to continue to be.” What this essentially means is turning from an unknowing anthropocentrism to taking responsibility for that which we anthropocentrically are.

Derrida, in putting forward his concept of the “university without condition,” as Richard Terdiman has pointed out, “has no way to explain how a current pernicious state of affairs could be altered. Indeed, he declines on principle to proffer an account of how this might happen.” (Terdiman 2007, p. 434). More than this, Derrida allows instrumentalism to arrive in the open-model university, accommodating an “end-orientated research” (Derrida 2004, pp. 141 and 143). In fact, Derrida is ambiguous: He wants to say this kind of research is the instrumental presence of corporatism while also having “noble aims.” Instrumentalism does not work in this way – what it negates is not offset by isolates of “the good.” Its habitus not only envelops the unthought (a condition implicit in all thinking), but also ensures an ongoing unknowing that keeps futural thinking at bay.

Terdiman's review of Derrida's “University Without Condition” shows he does not radically depart from the ethos of the modern university and an associated disjuncture between the university and the world. Derrida fails to see that there is no freedom without sustainment, however named (a failure that brings the notion of freedom within the university into serious question).

Neither Readings nor Derrida is willing to fully embrace the fact that there is never affirmative redirective change without conflict. Derrida idealistically demands a university with “unconditional freedom to question and to assert, or even, going still further, the right to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the truth” (Derrida 1998, p. 202).<sup>7</sup> Pluralism, education in error, and service to the unsustainable thus can continue. Freedom now for the many, as with freedom always, can only arrive via the imposition of limits.

What now follows is a departure from available radical positions like those just outlined to consider a redirective future form of the university that is transformative at a fundamental level.

<sup>7</sup> From Derrida's essay, “The University Without Condition.”

all that once formed the lower faculty (see Hindess 1995, pp. 29–49).

<sup>6</sup> Cited by Jacques Derrida (2003) from his “The University Without Condition,” which appeared in translation the prior year (Derrida 2002).

## Going Back to Go Forward

The West did not invent the university. Just to take one non-Western example: Between the fifth century to the twelfth century, the Nalanda University in Patna, India, was one of five Buddhist centers of learning. It was a residential university with over 10,000 students and 1,500 teachers with a focus on astronomy and mathematics. This university has now acquired special significance. Economist Amartya Sen has led the way to the recreation of Nalanda University (the bill authorizing its establishment was passed in August 2010, and it is scheduled to open in 2013).<sup>8</sup>

From a Western perspective, there have been two incarnations of the university to date. The founding of the University of Bologna in 1088 marked the creation of the West's first university (although it was not fully established until the mid-twelfth century with a charter instituted by Frederick Barbarossa that bade it to "live in obedience to God and the Emperor" – who was a minister of God). While its initial domain of learning was Roman and canon law, the university culture was dominantly theological. But by the fifteenth century, this model was in decline. Other universities formed, influenced by Greek thought, especially Aristotle. A widespread interest in "natural magic" (science) was gaining a substantial position in informing experimental practices. The modern secular university had, in fact, started to emerge, with reason becoming the foundation from which to create new knowledge.

Today, notwithstanding a vast number of institutions and tens of millions of students worldwide, a point has been reached when the modern university finds itself in a protracted afterlife wherein pragmatism has displaced any sense of a coherent intellectual project – it is this condition that Bill Readings designated as "ruins." Over the last thirty years, analysis of this situation has been articulated, not just from Bill Readings and Jacques Derrida, but also from J. Hillis Miller, William Spanos, Jurgen Habermas, Henry Giroux, and others. Yet to date, such critics have not faced the university's defuturing and unsustainable nature. A preoccupation with a transformation of "being-in-the-university" has overshadowed gaining the ability to confront "the being-of-the-university-in-the-world" (a confrontation that mainstream debates on "the role of the university in contemporary society" do not even begin to get near).

The contemporary global situation of multidimensional biophysical and geopolitical structural unsustainability is starting to expose large gaps between what we human beings actually know and what is needed to be known to deal with the situation we find ourselves in. Placed in this frame, the university dominantly serves the status quo. Even when it engages the agenda of "sustainability," it does so from a predominantly instrumental bias wherein "sustainability acts to sustain the unsustainable." It follows that a great deal of the knowledge the university delivers is *de facto* "education in error." Moreover, huge numbers of academics, but clearly not all, occupy positions of hiding in forms of esoteric or noncritical research

<sup>8</sup> This announcement appeared in the "Asia Times Online" (27 September 2011): [www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/MI27Df01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MI27Df01.html).

that reduces the function of the institution to that of a sheltered workshop. In this context, the residual rump of the humanities stumbles on in its often Eurocentric way, oblivious to the imperative of revealing anthropocentrism as the ground of its practice; such revealing of anthropocentric grounds is necessary in order to confront the question of taking responsibility for what we are.

Essentially this need for responsibility in action sits alongside that of acknowledging that the forms of knowledge that, under modernity, enabled the modern world to be brought into being are just not sufficient to deal with its resultant problems. Neither can most extant knowledge rise to the challenge of redirecting human action toward a more viable future. Unquestionably, postmetaphysical-situated knowledge with a futuring potential has to be created – by this is meant "knowledge" that rests on contextual understandings rather than upon universal truth claims.<sup>9</sup> The intent of this knowledge is to reconfigure fundamental conditions of exchange, take politics beyond "currently existing democracy," and above all, to ontologically transform the "nature" of the human being. Essentially, what these proposals imply is a project equal in scale to, and in the wake of, the Enlightenment – a project that can be named as the Sustainment.

Here then is the new single project of the university – a project able to accommodate a vast amount of difference. A project upon which the future of an ever-proliferating human population rests. This project cannot arrive out of the ruins. So we ask this question: How can a new kind of university happen?

The past provides the answer to this question. The modern university did not arrive as a new institution, but rather, a new way of knowing was appropriated by the existing institution so that it could "develop" – the old was thus redirected by the new. The challenge then is not just to create another fashionable theory or intellectual movement, but to establish a foundation of a new materialist mode of understanding amenable to appropriation. Effectively, the futural form of the university – in common with the very historical process that first brought it into being – will be the result of an appropriative event. What this actually means is that the existing university can be expected to appropriate "knowledge" (as knowledge has been qualified as a hermeneutic construct) from outside itself in order to meet the "demands of Sustainment". The implication here is of "an event" that will go on over an extensive period of time. Of course, saying this is one thing, and doing it is another. Yet there are groups, individuals, organizations, think tanks, and projects emerging that are so acting.<sup>10</sup> In so doing, they are not working within a common program, or even a clear recognition of who are the members of this "change community." Rather, they are an expression of a growing sensibility that has realized that the dominant instrumental paradigm that now directs university life cannot deliver a viable future (and not just for humanity). From this

<sup>9</sup> In very basic terms, what the move from knowledge (as truth) to understanding actually registers is a fundamental philosophical shift over the past century from theoretical epistemological models knowledge (claiming in various ways to represent "reality") to a hermeneutic model wherein what is seen to be "the real" is deemed to be the consequence of interpretation by a subject acting within the framing of a particular "discourse" in the context of a historically inscribed spatial context.

<sup>10</sup> In 2012, there are the future of the university events planned in the United States and Europe (including a Hothouse in Paris 10–13 July – details from [rebeccabarnett@live.com](mailto:rebeccabarnett@live.com)).

perspective, new modes of learning and new kinds of projects are underway. The strength of this "change community" is that action is proliferating in difference without the need of a consensual and common identity. It is constituted mostly from disenchanting and alienated academics around the world that have rejected a life in the ruins and affirm that it is valid to act with optimism notwithstanding the scale of the challenges.

To be able to comprehend a new way of thinking and acting able to make another kind of university, we need to revisit and reconfigure how we understand global circumstances.

### Seeing the University in an Otherwise Now

Where does the knowledge and energy to transform the university come from? In current global circumstances, we have indicated that it comes from the convergence of emerging, but still scattered, intellectual projects striving to respond to pressing material circumstance that threaten the well-being of humanity in its complex condition of dependencies.

Following this claim, two qualifications need making. The first again acknowledges that the future of humanity is under threat from the compounding actions of worldly negation of our own making (actions we have named elsewhere as "defuturing"), and the second acknowledges that anthropocentrism is intrinsic to our essence and equally to defuturing; thereafter, any action that sets out to secure "our" future survival has to recognize our being as anthropocentric and, in so doing, take responsibility for what we are and do.

The university of the future has to gain efficacy in overcoming the defuturing qualities of the present so as to make a future with a viable future (for us in our world of dependence). This means the university redirecting the status quo rather than supporting its extension. To do this means overcoming the conditions of unsettlement; it means diverting conflict rather than prompting it.

### Unsettlement: The Frame of a World of Change and "Us"

Unsettlement has emerged existentially over the last three decades as a reaction to convergences of increased population densities, growing climate change impacts and associated extreme weather events, and population displacement and conflict resulting from such occurrences and more.<sup>11</sup> Unsettlement, however, is

<sup>11</sup> In the twentieth century, homelessness was dominantly linked to war and economic upheavals, but it is becoming clear that in the twenty-first century, it will increasingly be driven by the unsustainable. For instance, "environmental/climate refugees," produced by ever-proliferating forms of unsustainability (including the unnaturalness of "natural disasters") now outnumber those created by conflicts. The number of environmental refugees is projected to dramatically increase in coming decades, mainly due to the effects of coastal flooding, shoreline erosion, and agricultural disruption. The figure given by the *Environmental Justice Foundation* report was that there could be 200 million "environmental refugees" by 2050 ("No Place Like Home Report" 2008, p. 7). The actual figure may

not just a naming of a geographically located physical situation. It equally names a state of mind of growing insecurity. It is a psychology, one affecting people well beyond those immediately impacted by a disaster. In locations in continual crisis, it will be permanent state of mind.<sup>12</sup>

Unsettlement is likely to become increasingly elemental to the everyday urban life as the size and density of cities grow. If a disaster (techno-natural or purely human) hits such a city, impacts will significantly increase. Added to this risk are the constantly growing number and size of informal cities.

Powered by the Enlightenment, the economic, political, scientific, and cultural knowledge and practices enacted in and by modernity took the constructive and destructive abilities of humanity to new heights. In the afterlife of modernity, in the "age of globalization," these ambiguous abilities have been further amplified. But what is now becoming increasingly clear is that our modern world-making has also been an unwitting unmaking. The energy, intellect, and imagination applied to our worldly creation have in no way been matched by comprehension of the implications of what has been destroyed in the process. These specific problems, gathered under the aegis of defuturing, are the heritage bequeathed by this historicity. Contrary to the impressions given by the discourse of "sustainability," these problems are not merely instrumental. The key problem is actually "us" – our dreams, desires, values, constructed needs, failed social ecologies, material irresponsibility, and worldly conduct are all at the core of our defuturing actions. We simply cannot continue to be as we are. Again, we have to strive to make ourselves other than we are, but not in the idealized transcendental form of the past (the fully civilized, the completely modern, the totally universal, and the absolutely human) but rather in recognition that we, in our difference, are "an animal materially out of control" and a being "less than human." That uncanny being, that being that we are, is a stranger unto itself that does not see the horror of its actions. It is only by seeing from the perspective of our animality among other animals that our monstrosity appears.

### Toward the Urmadic University

Ur: the very first, the *urban*, the displacement of *nomadic* by the city that moves.

The Urmadic University is the university without a place, a university within the developing notion of nomadic education that can move, as the Inna Semetsky (2008) collection indicates. The concept reflects a sensibility that recognizes a trace of the nomadic that we all have. A trace partly structurally reanimated

be much less or greater. The fact that some commentators are now saying that projected numbers of climate refugees have been widely exaggerated totally misses the point. The periods of time being discussed are, by planetary measures, infinitesimal. Thus, the fact that these refugees may arrive in, say, 100 years rather than the 50 in no way weakens the argument or discounts the threat.

<sup>12</sup> Unsettlement will actually merge with the already more general anxiety of late modern life, which itself is linked to "an awareness or foreboding of our homeless condition" and forces a living with what Heidegger called the "uncanniest of moods," cited by Leslie Paul Thiele (1995, p. 178).

(not least by the international labor market and by huge numbers of us becoming global information nomads).

In one way, the notion of the Urmadic University is simply used rhetorically to evoke and articulate knowledge that can be brought to/created out of situated engagements with the forces of unsettlement, the unsettled place, community, and subject. But equally, it is a nascent itinerant form of education and research action, centered on generated knowledge, projects, and events, with the intent of being available to be appropriated initially by a "change community" of appropriators. Currently, its focus is upon "event-based learning" and projects that focus on "thinking in time." At its most basic, this approach regards education as a mode of ontological design (a transformation of a mode of being-in-the-world rather than just the gaining of knowledge). More specifically, the Urmadic University is directed by three broad objectives:

1. *Deschooling* – To some degree, we have all been educated in error (that is, we have all been taught how to be unsustainable in various ways, from practices we have been inducted into, to the ambitions we have been encouraged to realize, and in the way we view and engage resources of the material world); by implication, this requires a process of unlearning (effectively this means a deconstructive displacement of many of the learnt assumption by which "we" understand and then act to negate the world of our existence).
2. *Learning in context* – Currently, the dominant model of the university is static. Notwithstanding fieldwork and forms of action research in some disciplines, the general proposition is that students travel to a specific place where they get exposed to a corpus of knowledge organized by particular disciplines. In contrast, the Urmadic University would engage substantial problems in place, with the understanding that knowledge has to be learnt and solutions found *in situ* (this knowledge can become generalized by mechanisms of appropriation). Such thinking comes out of direct experience. For instance, the idea of the Urmadic University partly came from working on "climate change moving city" projects, where it was recognized that the technical, geographical, economic, legal, sociocultural, and political problems of the task were huge, unfamiliar, and complex and required so much postdisciplinary dialogue that a "university *in situ*" needed to be created. With the prospect, over the next century, of some 600 million coastal dwellers, in very different circumstances, having to move, the ability to bring researchers and educators into such communities to work with them on the issues of moving (which deal as much with the "to" as the "from") seems essential.
3. *A new culture of learning* – In the structurally unsustainable present of unsettlement, it is crucial to develop "another way" to learn and to be. In the frame of the Urmadic University, this is exactly what a "*Neu Bildung*" aims to do. Writing on post-eighteenth century neohumanist pedagogy, self-reference, and *Bildung*, Niklas Luhmann notes: "*Bildung* was conceived as a methodology for developing skills, and learning how to learn was an essential component. This reflexivity allowed the idea that the learning process

equipped the individual for the 'world,' that is, for everything that he wanted to appropriate and enjoy by learning." (Luhmann 1995, p. 465)

Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his review of the humanist tradition in "Truth and Method," presented *Bildung* as one of the four guiding concepts of humanism (the other three are *sensus communis*, judgment, and taste) (Gadamer 1990, p. 11). Yet *Bildung* has still not been sufficiently recognized outside Germany beyond a few members of the academy (including Readings).<sup>13</sup> The historical idea of *Bildung* centered on "preservation" – what it most importantly set out to preserve was thinking. As Hegel understood and Gadamer articulated, philosophy and the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) in *Bildung* "have the condition of its existence".

Ruptured from its Eurocentric and anthropocentric nature, *Bildung* remade (*Neu Bildung*) would increasingly look like the designing of a mode of "dwelling" from which how "to dwell" is learnt (this dwelling understood as a being-in-process to secure the being-of-being).<sup>14</sup> In so doing, it certainly should not be the voice of a new humanist subject or the basis of utopian visions of the future. Rather, it would have to come out of an alienated "human nature" faced with unsettlement and the prospect of homelessness at its most fundamental (the loss of the familiar world).

Although the challenge of the remaking of the university is enormous and complex, the implication of what has been argued here is that it is unavoidable and has begun. If we are truly concerned with creating a viable future, this cannot be done independently from working toward the post-Enlightenment project of Sustainment. The claim of this article is not that it has delivered a complete case or an adequate solution, but rather that it provides an object of reflection and debate.

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<sup>13</sup> The well-documented history of *Bildung* commented upon by Gadamer, cites Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) as the pivotal figure in breaking the hegemony of objectified Enlightenment rationalism. Herder's projection of a subject-centred humanist force, presented as the "concept of self-formation, education, or cultivation (*Bildung*)" was "perhaps the greatest idea of the eighteenth century." The early use of the term was predicated upon the cultural form associated with *Bildung* coming from "nature" (rather than being its opposition). While this understanding fell from grace, it also returned – specifically as the agency of cultivation located with the subject's nurturing of their naturally given talents and abilities. While Kant and Hegel gave Herder's idea enormous intellectual momentum, it was von Humboldt who turned *Bildung* into a distinct and clear project.

<sup>14</sup> Dwelling, as Martin Heidegger (1975, pp. 143–162) makes clear in his oft-cited essay "Building, Dwelling Thinking," enfolds the totality of our being as we bring "the world" (as our world) into being, live within an environment, exist in our mortality, and are of mind and spirit. The nature of *Neu Bildung*, as learning for Sustainment, is discussed in detail by Tony Fry (2011, pp. 187–208).

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