

The Hedgehog and Lord Browne: The “To Come” of the Humanities

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Background

The close of 2010 saw England rocked by protests made by a section of society long and popularly vilified as apathetic and indolent. *Students*. Large scale student protests took place around the country on the 10th, 24th and 30th of November, the 9th of December, and then again on the 29th of January, as tens of thousands of students and academics across the country marched, occupied buildings, held sit-ins and teach-ins.¹ The protests, mainly peaceful, sometimes violent, saw the headquarters of the conservative party occupied, and students dancing on the streets. They saw graffiti on national monuments, and homework done on street corners. They saw a car carrying Prince Charles and Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, attacked, although neither was hurt. They also saw Jody McIntyre, a twenty year old activist suffering from cerebral palsy pulled from his wheelchair by police,² and twenty year old philosophy student Alfie Meadows rushed for emergency brain surgery after police baton charges.³ They saw the kettling⁴ of teenagers—the 24th saw protestors contained in temperatures close to freezing without food, water or access to toilet facilities from 1pm to 9pm,⁵ while the 9th saw the same treatment until close to midnight.⁶ They resulted in a 32 month jail sentence for Edward Woollard, an 18 year old A-Level student, who threw a fire extinguisher on the 10th of November,⁷ and to date have seen seven charged as a result of the protests on the 9th of December.⁸

On the 9th of December approximately 40,000 protestors attended the London marches, congregating in Parliament Square to hear the results of a parliamentary vote. This vote saw a report passed by a narrow margin of 21 votes. 27 members of the coalition had voted against it, two Liberal Democrats resigned,⁹ and Nick Clegg became the object of student anger.¹⁰ The cause of the vote, the cause of the kettling, the cause of the peaceful protests, the cause of the violent protests, the cause of the occupations, the conferences, the articles, the interventions, and the anger? The Browne Report.

The Higher Education Act of 2004, which came into effect in 2006, placed an annual cap on the amount any Higher Education Institution in England could charge each student. This cap—indexed over time—was set at £3,000, and the remainder of the costs of each degree was supplied from the public purse.¹¹ However, a global financial crisis caused concerns regarding public expenditure on third level education, and so in November 2009 Lord John Browne—a former Chief Executive of BP—was commissioned to lead a panel to review higher education funding and student finance.¹² The results were published on the 12th of October 2010 in what is generally referred to as the Browne Report. It cites its remit as follows:

The Review will analyse the challenges and opportunities facing higher education and their implications for student financing and support. It will examine the balance of contributions to higher education funding by taxpayers, students, graduates and employers. Its primary task is to make recommendations to Government on the future of fees policy and financial support for full and part time undergraduates and postgraduate students.¹³

Grandly entitled “Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education,” the Browne Report’s self-proclaimed “progressive” proposals state that the annual charge for a degree should begin at £6,000, and in the interest of free market competition be uncapped.¹⁴ Students begin loan repayment at 9% once they begin to earn above £21,000 per year, and any debt not cleared after 30 years is absorbed by the government.¹⁵ The repayment scheme is supposedly designed to ensure that part-time and poorer students will not feel prevented from attending university—part-time students are entitled to loans, means-tested grants are available from students from low-income families, and all students can repay their debt to the universities over the course of their working life.¹⁶ Which is precisely what will occur. As the Institute of Fiscal Studies writes, “For around half of graduates, the proposed system is effectively a 30-year graduate tax ... these individuals will simply pay 9% of their earnings above the repayment threshold for 30 years and then have the rest of their loan written off”.¹⁷

The Browne Report has, at its most basic level, a twofold implication. One, it means that students are now placed in large amounts of debt, and two, it means that university income is, with the exception of designated “priority” subjects,” wholly dependent on students’ fees. In other words, fees soar, funding plummets, and the education sector is, in the words of an IFS brief, turned into a “quasi-market.”¹⁸ The rhetoric of the Browne Report reduces education to technical training designed to create personal profit, and all rewards to be reaped are directly quantifiable in terms of capital and assets. Education is effectively to be privatised, on the premise that consumers know best, and that courses and institutions which cannot survive open competition are worthless. The Browne Report’s sustainable future is a dystopian wasteland, a bleak landscape of functionalist education where academic freedom, critical thought, speculative research, abstract reflection and theoretical engagement are to be discarded in favour of course work and academic practice that produce immediate economic gain. And in the drive to effectively abandon education in favour of training, nothing is more happily trod underfoot than the humanities.¹⁹ In *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Martha Nussbaum speaks of the current global education crisis, in which the humanities, “seen by policy-makers as useless frills, at a time when nations must cut away all useless things in order to stay competitive in the global market, ... are rapidly losing their place”.²⁰ This paper investigates the sustainable future offered by the Browne Report, a future in which the humanities are unashamedly classed as low-priority. It asks—following the Report’s rhetoric of choice—that we choose not its proffered limits and strictures, but reflect on the nature of the choice it offers, and choose differently. And in so doing, that we consider the hedgehog.

The Hedgehog

Literature, said Derrida, “perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It’s the most interesting thing in the world, *maybe more interesting than the world*” [emphasis added].²¹ And yet literature, this metonym of the humanities, this thing more interesting than the world, is under threat. Or rather, *because* literature is more interesting than the world, it is under threat. Literature, so dismissible an indulgence to some, is a defiant force, of the world and of more than the world. It is realist and idealist, normative and prescriptive, utopian and dystopian. It is mimetic and diegetic, performative and constative, thetic and non-thetic, fact and fiction, a function and a folly, a control and a freedom. Literature is singular and untranslatable, *resisting* paraphrase or commentary. However, literature is also multiple and a repeated translation, *always* paraphrase and commentary. The work, writes Blanchot, “said one time, said perfectly and incapable of being said again, nonetheless irresistibly tends to say itself over

again”.²² It thus contains within itself the “beautiful cruelty of analysis”; analysis which is not separate from the work, but which operates “by virtue of the separation already at work in it—a non-coincidence that would be its faint heartbeat”.²³ The (literary) work is fragmented, torn between that within it which is beyond knowledge, beyond the thetic, beyond the propositional, and that within it which is an engagement with knowledge: an investigation into knowledge and that which eludes knowledge. It, writes Derrida, “speaks beyond knowledge. It writes, and what it writes is, above all, precisely this: that it is addressed and destined beyond knowledge.”²⁴ Engaging with a piece of literature is always the task of engaging with that which cannot be wholly engaged with. When we work with literature we work with the world, and that which is more than the world. We work with that which is more than what it is, always a radical multiplicity and potentiality, rift between that which is of knowledge—that which can be re-presented in commentary, which can be the object of propositional statements—and that which is not. And therefore, as Cathy Caruth has stated,

To speak of the future of literary criticism is always to speak of the future of literature, which is a mode of language and an institution whose very being essentially touches on the possibility and fragility of its own future.²⁵

The future of literary theory is the future of literature, the future of the text is the future of the study of the text. But, as literature and the humanities are forced into increasingly inhospitable environments of impact and accountability, quantification and statistics, what a precarious future this is, and what threats currently loom!

In “*Che cos’è la poesia*” Derrida likens the poem, or what he terms the poematic, to the hedgehog: small, vulnerable and alone, rolled up in a ball on the highway. In reading the poem—in approaching the hedgehog—we preserve and destroy it, as by reading and assimilating we annihilate its alterity and reduce its potential. The poematic resists translation, resists exegesis, resists repetition, but at the same time needs it in order to exist—needs it in order to be read. Hence the poematic “Reiterate(s) in a murmur: never repeat”.²⁶ Hence the desire of the poematic: translate me but don’t translate me, let me be in language and yet beyond it.

Derrida’s hedgehog is an animal of chance, an animal exposed on the highway, and yet an animal of great persistence. While destined away from a propositional exegesis that will always reduce and constrain, the hedgehog will always lose a few spines in the inescapable brush with thetic comprehension. But because we can never close a context, because there is always something outside comprehension, our little hedgehog can never wholly and absolutely arrive, that is, can never be absolutely understood. And so the hedgehog can close its eyes, roll itself up and hope. It can never cross the road unscathed, but its crossings never end as they never reach the other side. Each reading of a text is a reduction as it automatically closes certain potentialities of meaning, but each closure is performed by a commentary that is also of ambiguity. Thus enigmas within the text are filled with more enigmas. The hedgehog’s vulnerability is also its strength, its weakness also a protection. The hedgehog may be small, but the hedgehog remains. It is of knowledge and beyond knowledge, of the quantifiable and in excess of the quantifiable, of the world and more than the world.

For Friedrich Schlegel the hedgehog represented the fragment. “A fragment,” he wrote, “like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog.”²⁷ But as complete as the hedgehog may be, its

totalisation is interrupted by an internal split. Unique, the hedgehog/fragment rejects all examples other than itself, and it is therefore itself and representation of itself, whole and internally fragmented, one and divided. In turning in on itself it points outwards from itself, its spines a defence and an engagement. Thus, for Schlegel too, literature, the work of art, is itself and more than itself, a hedgehog containing quantification and propositional paraphrase while also resisting and exceeding it: "A work is cultivated when it is everywhere sharply delimited, but within those limits limitless and inexhaustible; when it is completely faithful to itself, entirely homogeneous, and nonetheless exalted above itself."²⁸ The hedgehog fragment is thus always more than itself, a project, a "fragment of the future",²⁹ a calling to what comes next and what will, even with each addition, remain open. Despite the concerted efforts of late to restrict the hedgehog's future, and make it, if not just of this world, then wholly absent from it.

John Browne is not too fond of hedgehogs. In fact, his proposals for hedgehogs are disconcertingly reminiscent of the narrator's treatment of the hedgehog in Beckett's *Company*, although one doubts that Browne had either the narrator's good intentions or will feel his later guilt. In *Company* the narrator remembers how he once proudly saved a hedgehog and placed it in a disused hutch. But the next morning a sense of unease began to grow:

A suspicion that all was perhaps not as it should be. That rather than do as you did you had perhaps better let good alone and the hedgehog pursue its way. Days if not weeks passed before you could bring yourself to return to the hutch. You have never forgotten what you found then. You are on your back in the dark and have never forgotten what you found then. The mush. The stench.³⁰

Browne has removed the hedgehog from a functioning, if not ideal environment, and abandoned it. His sustainable future makes no effort to sustain education and maintain the importance of the humanities; it effectively leaves the hedgehog to die alone in the dark, haunted by the spectres of a bleak future. It kettles it; enclosing it within a "safe" perimeter, and then turning its back.

Choice

The glorious future offered by the Browne Report is one of "choice" and "sustainability". Students, at "the heart of the system," are deemed to be "best placed to make judgements about what they want to get from participating in higher education" (BR 25). It is their choices that decree whether a course, faculty or university can continue or must close, and thus students no longer simply attend universities but invest capital in them. As universities compete for students, quality will, we are assured, increase, as in the logic of the Browne Report the best is the most popular, the most valuable is that which yields the highest returns, and education is predicated on later earning power. It opines that open competition directly equates to increased quality, and that it was the lack of competition that caused problems within the education system. As demand was greater than supply, institutions did not have to fight for students and were under no obligation to improve their "product." Hence "Growth within successful institutions [was] stifled; less successful institutions [were] insulated from competition; and students [did] not have the opportunity to choose between institutions on the basis of *price and value for money*" [emphasis added] (BR 32). In this education by numbers a successful university is one which has high levels of student investors/consumers, and a successful graduate is one who meets, or surpasses, the forecasted earning level for her course. While the Browne Report may smugly claim that it "never lost sight of the value of learning to students, nor

the significant contribution of higher education to the quality of life in a civilised society” (BR 56), it is clear that it deems the value of learning to be income, and the contribution of higher education to life and society to be more income. The halcyon future offered by the Browne Report means that one chooses one’s education based on a loose understanding of value for money. That the best, most successful and most valuable education defies this mode of quantification is ignored.

A system centred on a loose sense of value for money is a system predicated on a naïve notion of the correspondence of learning and capital, where capital is always to be elevated and preserved. This sense of blind economy can be seen in the budget of the Browne Report itself, which one might, with dark humour, call a bargain. Out of a total available budget of £120,000, the review spent just £68,375 on research, the bulk of which went on an opinion survey.³¹ While in these days of economic uncertainty some frugality is to be commended, a report introducing such cataclysmic changes into the education system should without doubt be based on more than the recording of opinions. Some research, for example, into the functioning of such a system in other countries does not seem like an unreasonable demand.

The Browne Report offers us a sustainable future that is only attainable, we are told, by controlled open competition, by “removing the blanket subsidy for all courses—without losing vital public investment in priority courses.” (BR 8) Higher education “helps to produce economic growth, which in turn contributes to national prosperity” (BR 14). Graduates should enable “firms to identify and make more effective use of knowledge, ideas and technologies” (BR 14); the current system fails because “many graduates lack the skills they [employers] need to improve productivity.” (BR 23) Higher education, according to the Browne Report, is technical and vocational training, education subordinated to the purpose of accruing wealth and improving business. It is valuable because it makes us more money, and thus the Browne Report echoes the global trend of what Nussbaum calls “education for profit” or “education for economic growth.”³² It makes money for the country, but primarily it makes money for the individual, as the Browne Report believes that one should ask “those who gain private benefits from higher education to help fund it rather than rely solely on public funds collected through taxation from people who may not have participated in higher education themselves.” (BR 21) Education becomes a private business of accumulating private assets. It’s a personal gamble, an individual venture which indirectly, accidentally, can lead to public prosperity, but which has as its primary goal the personal accruing of capital. Each student becomes her own private limited company, investing in herself, producing herself, selling herself. No public shares, no public investment, just private gain that is immediately quantifiable as funds, and hence “students ... should ‘pay more’ in order to ‘get more’.” (BR 4) This emphasis on the generation of capital does not respect critical thought, does not promote speculation—unless it be financial—and does not provide space for reflection, but insists on testable, concrete skills that are immediately applicable to business and technology. The sustainable footing of education is thus to be a future of autonomous but mechanical individuals who fight in the democratic, open competition of the free market, but who have been denied—or, in the rhetoric of the Browne Report, have chosen to deny themselves—the skills to intellectually engage with that market, that competition, that democracy, and that freedom.

But while we must fault the Browne Report for its conceptualisation of students as self-serving competitors, investing in the luxury of privately focused education, we must also be aware of the danger of understanding education, and particularly the humanities, as

that which specifically or solely serves the needs of society. As Žižek has said, in such a case higher education is forced to serve the function of providing experts on tap, repair people who can provide succinct, accessible and readily transmittable summations or analyses of situations.³³ Knowledge is subordinated to a purpose; it is offered in direct response to a particular situation and applied to discrete, isolated instances. Knowledge is reduced to a tool which can uniformly respond to clearly outlined aims, and which takes the form of facts and information serving the state/company. It is, in other words, Kant's private use of reason. What is lacking, or suppressed, is a *public use of reason*, a questioning of the goals themselves, an interrogation of the questions and the premises and the underlying presumptions made in the questions.

While Browne may not be overly concerned with the future of the hedgehog, Stefan Collini points out that he clearly is very much perturbed by different beast with spikes, the mythical beast that is "The Taxpayer." As Collini says, "This morose, prickly creature is intensely suspicious of all contact with others, fearing the abduction and loss of its hoard, the fruits of what it always likes to call its hard-earned labours".³⁴ Fearful of "The Taxpayer," Browne has abdicated all involvement in the education offered by the humanities, and handed all to the student consumer. The student, or rather, student of the future, is placed in a situation of debt and control; debt because she is locked into owing vast sums throughout her future, and control because the Browne Report opines that "Students are best placed to make the judgment about what they want to get from participating in higher education." (BR 25) Their choices, says the Browne Report, "will shape the landscape of higher education" (BR 4), and so it triumphantly declares that "*Choice* is in the hands of the student." [emphasis added] (BR 3) Not "*education* is in the hands of the student." Not "*the future* is in the hands of the student." Not "*the universities* are in the hands of the student," but *choice*, *choice* having become an end in itself. *Choice*, in the Browne Report, becomes equal to free will and the exercise of individuality, so that "I think, therefore I am" becomes "I choose, therefore I am (educated)." Choice—now sufficient in and to itself, rather than that which is applied—replaces education and engagement. The Browne Report does not offer education, nor does it strive to protect principles of thought, engagement and research. Instead the Browne Report magnanimously enables the student to select between universities, and in this act of selection deems her highest power and ability to have been realised. What the Browne Report offers—*forces*—is choice, but what kind of choice is forced choice? And is a choice that is no more than a selection between existing, homogenous options really worthy of the name? In putting only *selection* in the hands of the student, the Browne Report washes its hands of education; it offers little and reneges on all.

But in the midst of the Browne Report's rhetoric of absolute student choice and its apparently *laissez-faire* proposal for education, there remain traces of official doubt as to the wisdom of leaving the creation of an educated workforce wholly in the hands of student investor-consumers. Hence the introduction of a safe-guard, a little protection against the possible autoimmune collapse of market-led education. This prophylactic comes in the form of the identification of

clinical and priority courses such as medicine, science and engineering that are important to the well being of our society and to our economy. The costs of these courses are high and, if students were asked to meet all of the costs, there is a risk that they would choose to study cheaper courses instead. (BR 25)

Student choice alone is the driving force of the system, student choice alone will create quality, and student choice alone sustains education. That is, of course, in low priority, *cheaper* areas like the humanities and the social sciences; subject that are, by implication, *not* important to the well-being of our society. Students may be named the heart of the system, but the STEM subjects are deemed the core, and free market competition will only be allowed to run unchecked when the stakes are comfortably low. While, according to the Browne Report, our options are strictly either “*a bureaucratic and imperfect measure for quality*” (BR 28) or “student choice,” it seems that for the sciences, medicine and languages useful for international trade a certain bureaucratic intervention is required. And so Browne recommends the creation of a Higher Education Council, whose core responsibility is the protection of (the) STEM by “identifying and investing in high priority courses.” (BR 46) Priority subjects form the solid, dependable nucleus of an economy, while the humanities—the hedgehog—are marginal, decorative embellishments, fripperies that students may indulge in but which need no protection. Thus free choice becomes decidedly less free, and the choice in the hands of the student is a highly mediated one. Choice does not reign supreme in the case of the STEM subjects, as they are removed from the vagaries of market whim. And while the humanities and social sciences are abandoned to the dictates of the market, the supposed open freedom of the choice offered by Browne is perverted in designating them low-priority. The glorious future of *choice* is not only a restricted future of *selection*, but a guided one at that.

In addition to investing in priority courses the Higher Education Council has as its responsibility the tasks of “setting and enforcing baseline quality levels; delivering improvements on the access and completion rates of students from disadvantaged backgrounds; ensuring that students get the benefits of more competition in the sector; and resolving disputes between students and institutions.” (BR 45) The HE Council is quality assurance, supposedly “independent from Government and institutions” (BR 46), and subject, one perhaps naively presumes, to the Haldane Principle. The Haldane Principle states—as put in a recent statement on the allocation of science and research funding—that “decisions on individual research proposals are best taken by researchers themselves through peer review.”³⁵ And yet, as noted by Peter Mandler, this recent statement on the direction and priorities of the AHRC—Arts and Humanities Research Council—is unsubtly and unabashedly dictated to by the rhetoric and priorities of the government’s functional view of the humanities.³⁶ This statement designates six strategic research areas as “the highest priorities in arts and humanities”: “communities and big society; civic values and active citizenship, including ethics in public life; creative and digital economy; cultural heritage; language-based disciplines; and interdisciplinary collaborations with a range of STEM subjects.”³⁷ The AHRC, we are told, “will systematically address issues relating to social cohesion, community engagement and cultural renewal contributing to the ‘Big Society’ initiative.”³⁸

The humanities are therefore not only very clearly obliged to forward the coalition government’s agenda, but are clearly restricted to what we might term *practical theorising*. Their role is to reflect on new scientific and social endeavours, and inform the inventors of their implications. The sciences will invent, while the humanities will teach languages so we can share inventions. The sciences will invent, while the humanities will teach ethics so we can—responsibly—use inventions. The sciences will invent, while we in the humanities will teach history to record past inventions, study societies that use inventions, and, after collaboration with inventors, maybe write a few lines on the aesthetics or poetics of invention. But not, of course, invent. The interdisciplinarity that the Browne

Report indirectly promotes and the BIS statement actively decrees is one of strict hierarchy: the humanities are subsidiaries of the sciences, minor tributaries from the greater stream of (business) development. The humanities' function is theorisation to a purpose, whereby the purpose is the production and increase of capital. As this statement on the future—*the now*—of funding priorities and direction in the AHRC shows, decisions on research are very much to be taken by a department tellingly named *Business Innovation and Skills*, and not by researchers and academics themselves. The government may not want to pay for the humanities, but it is determined to dictate its direction, and thus the independence of the proposed HE council seems as unlikely as the independence of the AHRC and the British Academy.

Sustainability

In a tragic, and farcical, appropriation of the language of environmental campaigns—perhaps unsurprising in an ex Chief Executive of BP—Browne offers us a “sustainable future.” Browne’s future, this “system that is sustainable for the long term,” is the future of market choice (BR 54). In a mockery of the reduction of human impact on struggling ecosystems, by removing funding the Browne Report has effectively abandoned the struggling education system. But while stepping away from a sensitive ecology may be a positive move, leaving education to survive based on market decree is without doubt not. Education is left to sustain itself through student investment, donations and endowments, and while the concept of “natural” is fraught, it can surely be agreed that the “natural” (eco)system of education—the (eco)system of the hedgehog—is *not* privatised and market driven. Privatisation, Wendy Brown argues in “Why Privatisation is About More Than Who Pays,” leads to restricted academic freedom, a diminished sense of shared purpose within the university, and a concentration on research that serves potential funders rather than the public good. It—chillingly—turns academic staff into an “efficient instructional delivery system generating human capital.”³⁹ Browne’s sustainable future for higher education hence looks increasingly like the systematic destruction of the ecosystem of the humanities, and the death of knowledge, unconstrained questioning and free, speculative thought. Browne’s future is a sustained future as *restrained* future, a future closed off and shut down.

Sustainability is a notoriously malleable term, used by environmental campaigners, economists, urban planners, educators and policy makers. The definition proffered by the World Commission on Environment and Development (The Brundtland Commission) in *Our Common Future* (1987) states that “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁴⁰ To sustain is to keep, to hold, to nourish, to protect, to maintain, to continue, to undergo. To sustain is to prevent (environmental) degradation, to allow balance between minimal (environmental) damage and human support, and to use resources in a way that never wholly depletes them. To sustain implies both stasis and movement, preserving the present and moving towards the future, but a future of minimal difference, a future of repetitions of the present (equilibrium). Its rhetoric is one of tolerance, of non-interference, of protection through a controlled non-involvement.

As the Commission writes, “The concept of sustainable development does imply limits – not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities.”⁴¹ The limits of sustainability are the limits of what we can achieve, given the present social structure, given present technological capabilities,

given present understanding of economic systems, and given present conceptualisations of education. In keeping with this structure of limitation, the sustainable future envisioned by the Browne Report is one enclosed, restricted and de(limited). The sustainability of the Browne Report is the sustainability of kettling, “preserving” education through its mode of control, containment, and claustrophobic isolation, and so the caging of the student protesters on the street is mirrored in the proposed caging of education itself. The universities are ringfenced, surrounded and controlled by a strict, government controlled perimeter, but within the limits are abandoned to struggle within the melee of open competition. It’s the tolerance of a refusal to engage, an intolerant tolerance, a suppression and control that is also an abandonment. It polices the perimeters but ignores what occurs within, presuming with a hideous, misappropriated and misunderstood Darwinism that the survival of the fittest will ensue, and that competition will leave the strongest and the best. The Brutland Commission employed the term “sustainable” in response to what it perceived to be a “threatened future”, but it is the dictates of the sustainable future offered by the Browne Report that escalate the threat to education.

Francis Mulhern, at a recent conference in Birkbeck entitled “Why Humanities,” pointed out that while we are currently being asked to “be realistic” about what the future can sustain, something that is not adequate to its own stated ends is not realistic.⁴² Being realistic about the education we provide and the research we do should not require us to abandon principles of education and research. He also calls the current state of the university one of a “university corporatism” whose future seems increasingly narrow. In this corporation we have the ascendancy of evaluation, accountability, goals, outcomes and achievements, and the setting aside of anything that cannot be measured in terms of quantifiable procedures. League tables generate distinctions where none can exist in reality, and the selection of the same masquerades as free and open choice between alterities.

Supplementing this rhetoric of choice/selection and strict quantifiability is the Browne Report’s insistence on the sanctifying of satisfaction and the student satisfaction survey. It complains that “Students are no more satisfied with higher education than ten years ago” (BR 23), and laments that there has been no more than a 2% increase in satisfaction in the last five years—from 80% in 2005 to 82% in 2010 (BR 23). Student satisfaction is by no means to be ignored, and it is important that students are given the opportunity to voice their opinions on teaching hours, contact time, facilities, assessment and course content. But the discourse of the Browne Report is one which promotes continuous progression, of boom following boom in a housing industry that never goes bust but builds and builds and builds. It presumes that progress is infinite, that growth should be exponential, and that both growth and progress are absolutely positive. The ideal product of Browne’s education system is a satisfied student, but if every graduate we produce has no suggestions for improvement, no proposals for change, no criticisms of practices, then our students are not simply satisfied, but so inculcated in the system that the system seems absolutely correct. And this is not what education should bring. This is not to promote poor teaching practice, low contact hours, over-worked staff, disinterested tutors, badly designed modules or inadequate libraries under a Spartan premise that hardship is a useful pedagogic tool, but that students should be trained to reflect on their education, to critically engage with it, and to note the possibilities of enhancement. An overwhelming response of satisfaction hints not at success, but a certain hopelessness and an inability to intellectually reflect on potentiality and difference.

Under the current climate change in the universities, the sustainable future forced on us sustains bureaucracy, retains unnecessary administration and maintains exorbitant salaries for Vice-Chancellors. Browne has failed to suggest ways of making universities more efficient, and instead has concentrated on imposing on universities the model of private business, designating as a task of the Higher Education council the role of arbitrator when the student consumer is dissatisfied with the education purchased. Hence the council of Higher *Education* also receives reports on each institution as a “viable going concern” (BR 46) and “explore[s] options such as mergers and takeovers led by other providers” (BR 46)... As Iain Pears has noted, Browne made no attempt to uphold education by cutting managerial and administrative aspects of the university.⁴³ He treated the university system like a business in every way but the crucial one—in situations of economic uncertainty one cuts overheads and streamlines in order to retain the essence of the company: the product.

The customer/product situation in a university is a complicated one—are students consumers, buying education, or are they, once educated, the product? Do we sell education or manufacture educated people? The Browne Report is itself ambiguous about this point: statements such as “Institutions will have to persuade students that the charges they put on their courses represents [sic] value for money” (BR 25) imply that students buy education, while arguments that certain priority courses “deliver significant social returns such as to provide skills and knowledge currently in shortage or predicted to be in the future” (BR 47) suggest that educated graduates (from priority courses) are a (useful) product. But one should stress that regardless of the breakdown, thinking of the university in terms of product and manufacturing is already too far down the road of privatised, market driven companies. We should instead be thinking of the common good, and the ineffability of certain kinds of human development and knowledge. We should instead be thinking of a mode of education that remembers the hedgehog.

The Future Perfect and the “To Come”

Turning from the rhetoric of the Browne Report to its structure, we see that the containment and confinement of its “sustainable future” is performed in the structure of the future perfect it imposes on students. In Browne’s glorious future of choice/section, students are asked, before they have a university degree, to project themselves into the future and from that position of knowledge form the path of their education. They are asked—forced—therefore, to shape education through the structure of the future anterior or future perfect tense; from the present to jump to the future and look from there to the past, to the moment of choosing.⁴⁴ The future perfect requires a leap of progression and regression, of interrupted and interrupting prolepsis and analepsis. It speaks of a situation that is future/past: she will have gone. We will have learned. We will have chosen the appropriate subjects. The market will have spoken and the market will have been right. In other words, from the present we speak of a future, but a future changed by an action occurring between the spoken present (the now) and the anticipated future. The future effectively both changes and is changed by this event in the future/past.

The future perfect signifies disjunction and interruption, and in that interruption is a lot of promise. But there is also a danger to the future perfect, a certain self-fulfilment and closure belied by the temporal ambiguity. While the move from the future to the past implies a change in narration and order that suddenly makes the future look quite different, it also forces the future to be seen as an absolute inevitability, as an inescapable outcome of an expected and predicted series of events. The future university students

will pick the correct modules because in the act of picking them they will be correct. The future university students will pick the modules of high quality because in the act of picking them their quality and value will be proven. Interestingly, on the rare occasion that the Browne Report speaks of a course chosen by students as failing, the reason given is that the university or department lied: “Courses that deliver improved employability will prosper; those that make false promises will disappear” (BR 31). The market will have spoken, and rather like the Party and Minitrue in *Nineteen Eighty Four*, everything it says is true. Because in saying it it was always true. Those that try and cheat the system will be discovered, and seen to always have been wrong. And we all know what happens when we try and cheat the system. It’s no longer hedgehogs, but rats...

Thus the ambiguity of the future perfect is lost in damning sense of always already: this year all students pick a safe option, an employable STEM subject. They will have chosen the correct subject. It is always already the correct subject because the act of choosing it always made it so. However, one could argue that there is the problem of the hallowed student satisfaction survey. Having chosen the “correct” subject students might later voice dissatisfaction, and we then have disjunction: numbers indicate that the subject was correct, but satisfaction indicates the subject was incorrect. The all-sustaining logic of the future perfect comes into play: ratings are low, fewer students will choose the subject the next year, it will always already have been a poor choice. The future will have changed the past, the market will have spoken.

What we require, instead of Browne’s sustainable future, a future (perfect) of kettling and restraints, is a formulation of and for the future that avoids the limitations and restrictions of the predictable, and instead retains an openness and sufficient sense of alterity. In order to emphasise precisely this difference, Derrida distinguishes between the “future” and the “to come”. The future, he argues, is noteworthy for its predictability. It expresses the expected, it marks the advent of happenings, of anticipated and anticipatable occurrences. It is thus necessary, Derrida writes,

to free the value of the future from the value of “horizon” that traditionally has been attached to it—a horizon being, as the Greek word indicates, a limit from which I pre-comprehend the future. I wait for it, I predetermine it, and thus I annul it. Teleology is, at bottom, the negation of the future, a way of knowing beforehand the form that will have to be taken by what is still to come.⁴⁵

In other words, in order for an event to be, in order for the future to remain unpredictable and without prescribed limits, we should think in terms of the “to come.” When we speak of the *future* of the humanities, of the *future* of education, we speak of its limits and its ends. When we speak of the post-Browne Report future of Higher Education we most definitely speak of constraints, predicted outcomes and the forecasted death of the event. What we should be speaking of is the “to come,” the “perhaps,” the surprising, the unanticipated. The Browne Report is imposing a future on us, a future of forecasts and outcomes, accountability and transparency. None of these words are terrible words, but they are words that rob us of opportunity, of spaces to question questions, of heterogeneity and alterity. “Transparency,” Graham Allen has written, “is a force against conflict: the question remains, however, whether conflict is as pernicious in intellectual spheres as it is in the sphere of international relations.”⁴⁶

The Browne Report, and all other similar trends in education that pre-date the current crisis, opposes the notion of the “to come” because the “to come” is precisely not

something that is transparent, accountable or quantifiable. It resists projections and tables and its impact cannot be forecast. These trends desire a university that is bound by conditions and limits, rather than what Derrida calls “the university without condition.” The university without condition is one which is “autonomous, unconditionally free in its institution, in its speech, in its writing, in its thinking. In a thinking, a writing, a speech that would not be only the archives or the productions of *knowledge*, but also performative works.”⁴⁷ The university without condition is a place in which we do not only discuss constative,thetic knowledge, but where we engage with the performative, with information that produces and alters and changes in ways that are not reducible to maps and forecasts. This university recognises that we move between knowledge discussed, knowledge produced, and something eluding (thetic) knowledge. This university recognises the hedgehog.

Derrida refers to the right to deconstruction “as an unconditional right to ask critical questions not only about the history of the concept of man, but about the history even of the notion of critique, about the form and the authority of the question, about the interrogative form of thought.”⁴⁸ “The university,” he continues,

should thus also be the place in which nothing is beyond question, not even the current and determined figure of democracy, not even the traditional idea of critique, meaning theoretical critique, and not even the authority of the “question” form, of thinking as “questioning”. That is why I spoke without delay or disguise about deconstruction.⁴⁹

The university to come, the university without condition, is a place of the humanities, a place of deconstruction, a place of theory, a place of literature. It is a place of the hedgehog.

If the university to come must operate within the confines of the Browne Report, then it must take what Browne offers and read it otherwise. If in the rhetoric of freedom presented by the Browne Report all we are offered is selection masquerading as choice—decide and exercise your human rights, pick and be free, choose and (in the act) be educated—then we must recognise the autoimmune potentiality in this choice, and turn it on itself. Browne has put choice in the hands of the students. When something is in your hands there is a duty of care, a responsibility to preserve, a vulnerability in the object and power in the subject. If *choice* is in the hands of the student then the student may turn on choice, turn on the choices offered by Browne, and turn on increased debt and the privatisation of the universities. If all Browne can offer is choice, then we must question choice itself and choose to choose differently. Choose to recognise openness. Choose to recognise alterity. Choose to recognise the value of education that is not reducible to transferable skills and immediate economic gain. Choose to recognise the humanities. Choose to recognise literature. Choose to recognise the hedgehog.

Literature is an indispensable part of the university to come, because of the openness that literature contains and its engagement with the perhaps, with possibilities, and with potentialities. Literature is a vital part of the university to come, because of its relation to fiction, to the performative, to work and the work, to the right to engage and say and speak and invent and profess. To return to the quotation with which we began, literature, Derrida says, “perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It’s the most interesting thing in the world, *maybe more interesting than the world.*”⁵⁰ What we approach when we approach literature is something more than what we

have. Literature is everything that is in the world, and it is something more. It is case study and cultural document and financial report and social investigation and psychological outline and historical explication and political mapping and it is more. It is thetic and constative and propositional and it is more. It is aesthetic and performative and poetic and it is more. It has a referential purpose but it is also beyond simple reference and basic explicatory functionality. It is not reducible to practical theorising at the service of the sciences but questions and undercuts their very positions. It takes the limits of Browne's sustainable future and transgresses them, surpasses them, already beyond them from within them. The future that Browne offers may be of this world, but it is a world that is constrained by the limits that effect the unimaginative. We in the humanities study this world and more than the world, we study literature that is the future without limits, literature that is the "to come." Our hedgehog, we should remember, is a very important animal indeed.

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Notes

¹ For some excellent blogs on the protests see *The Disorder of Things*: <http://thedisorderofthings.wordpress.com/2010/11/11/ethics-of-austerity-2-interlude-of-broken-glass/> and

<http://thedisorderofthings.wordpress.com/2010/11/15/zero-level-protest-the-student-movement-and-the-spectacle-of-politics/>.

K-punk's blog coverage: <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/011750.html>.

Andy Haden's at <http://andyhaden.wordpress.com/>.

Paul Sugar's *Bad Conscience* <http://badconscience.com/2010/12/11/reflections-on-a-riot/>.

See videos here <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/video/2010/nov/24/london-student-protests> and here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PC3C-gkvUWI>.

² Patrick Sawyer, "Police dragged me from wheelchair twice during protests, says demonstrator", *The Telegraph*, 12th December 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/8196630/Police-dragged-me-from-wheelchair-twice-during-protests-says-demonstrator.html>.

³ Report on the attack, *BBC News*, 10th December 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-11967098>. An article by Susan Matthews—Alfie Meadows' mother—on the protests and kettling: "It's time for parents to stand with their children at the student protests" *The Guardian*, 28th January 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/28/students-children-kettle-police-violence>.

⁴ The tactic of "kettling"—the containment of protesters in a police controlled and cordoned area—has come under much attack. See *BBC News*, 27th January 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-12293394>. It was later suggested that the police might bring in water cannons, but the Home Secretary subsequently changed her policy on this. See Tom Whitehead, "Home Secretary in U-turn on water cannon"

The Telegraph, 14th December 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/8199654/Home-Secretary-in-U-turn-on-water-cannon.html>.

⁵ *BBC News*, 24th November 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-11834784>.

⁶ Andrew Sparrow, "Student Protests – as they happened," *The Guardian*, 9th December 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/blog/2010/dec/09/student-protests-live-coverage?INTCMP=SRCH>.

⁷ For article by Deborah Orr against the sentence see: "The judge was wrong in his sentencing of Edward Woollard," *The Guardian*, 13th January 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/13/judge-wrong-in-sentencing-edward-woollard>.

⁸ Press Association, "Charlie Gilmour among seven charged over student protests," *The Guardian*, 27th January 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/27/charlie-gilmour-charged-student-protests>.

⁹ *BBC News*, 9th December 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11964669>.

¹⁰ Leader of the Liberal Democrats and deputy Prime Minister. Prior to the election Clegg and the Liberal Democrats courted student votes by promising to abolish student fees over a six-year period.

¹¹ For an overview of the historical background to fees and funding in the English third level system see Stefan Collini's "Browne's Gamble," *The London Review of Books* 32.21, 4th November 2010, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n21/stefan-collini/brownes-gamble>.

¹² For an over-view of the panel members see Polly Curtis, "Top-up fees independent review: the board," *The Guardian*, 9th November 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/nov/09/university-tuition-fees-review-board>.

¹³ The Browne Report, 12th October 2010 <http://hereview.independent.gov.uk/hereview/report/>, 57. Hereafter cited in text as "BR." The report later designated postgraduate issues outside its scope.

¹⁴ The government later capped this at £9,000, and introduced a National Scholarships programme, so that any university charging over £6,000 will be obliged to contribute to outreach and access schemes. See David Willetts' statement here: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/speeches/david-willetts-statement-on-HE-funding-and-student-finance>.

¹⁵ For differences between the recommendations of the Browne Report, and the plans carried forward by Parliament, see report prepared by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS). The report "Higher Education Reforms: Progressive but Complicated with an Unwelcome Incentive" (IFS Briefing Note 113) can be downloaded here: <http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/5366>.

¹⁶ A summary of the financial implications for students can be found here at the *BBC News*, 28th January 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-11483638>.

¹⁷ IFS Report, 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁹ For a chilling article on the financial state of universities in the US see Linda Ray Pratt's "The Financial Landscape of Higher Education: Mapping a Rough Road Ahead," *MLA's Profession* 2010, 131-140.

²⁰ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

²¹ Jacques Derrida, "This Strange Institution Called Literature" Interview with Derek Attridge, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 47.

²² Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 389.

²³ Ibid, 390.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen, trans. Thomas Dutoit, Outi Pasanen et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 34.

²⁵ Cathy Caruth "Afterword: Turning Back to Literature" *PMLA* 125.4 (2010): 1087.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, "*Che cos'è la poesia*", trans. Peggy Kamuf, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 233.

²⁷ Friedrich Schlegel "*Athenäum fragments*", *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1971), fragment 206.

²⁸ Ibid, fragment 297.

²⁹ Ibid, fragment 22.

³⁰ Samuel Beckett, "Company", *Nohow On* (London: John Calder, 1989), 24.

³¹ See John Morgan, "Now that's research impact: 'paradigm-shifting' Browne drew on a single opinion survey", *Times Higher Education*, 6th January 2011, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=414764>.

³² Nussbaum, 10.

³³ Slavoj Zizek, "Violence Revisited," Birkbeck, 12th November 2010, <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/11/slavoj-zizek-violence-revisited/>. This argument can also be found in "A Permanent Economic Emergency," *New Left Review* 64 (2010): 90.

³⁴ Stefan Collini, "Holding Our Nerve," *Why Humanities*, Birkbeck, 5th November 2010 <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/11/stefan-collini-holding-our-nerve/>.

³⁵ Department for Business Innovation and Skills statement "The Allocation of Science and Research Funding 2011/12 to 2014/15", December 2010. Pdf available here: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/topstories/2010/Dec/science-research-and-hefce-funding>, 13.

³⁶ Peter Mandel "While you were looking elsewhere...The Haldane Principle and the Government's Research Agenda for the Arts and Humanities," *Humanities and Social Sciences Matter: Campaign for the Humanities and Social Sciences in UK Universities*, 30th December 2010, <http://humanitiesmatter.wordpress.com/2011/01/30/while-you-were-looking-elsewhere%E2%80%A6the-haldane-principle-and-the-government%E2%80%99s-research-agenda-for-the-arts-and-humanities/>.

³⁷ "The Allocation of Science and Research Funding 2011/12 to 2014/15," 22.

³⁸ Ibid, 22.

³⁹ Wendy Brown, "Why Privatisation is About More Than Who Pays," *Save the University: A Teach-In on the UC Crisis*, UC Berkeley, 23rd September 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aR4xYBGdQgw>.

⁴⁰ "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future" (1987) <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm>.

⁴¹ "Our Common Future" <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-ov.htm#I.3>.

⁴² Francis Mulhern, "Humanities and University Corporatism", *Why Humanities*, Birkbeck, 5th November 2010, <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/11/francis-mulhern-humanities-and-university-corporatism/>.

⁴³ Iain Pears, "Taxes, Banks, Loans, and Students" *Why Humanities*, Birkbeck, 5th November 2010, <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/11/iain-pears-historian-and-writer-taxes-banks-loans-and-students/>.

⁴⁴ One can of course pause here and say that this problem is far from new, as students have always been asked to choose a degree before they have the tools to properly make this decision. And this is indeed true. The difference is that hitherto departments were

insulated from total dependence on what students, prior to a degree, think a degree should be.

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 20.

⁴⁶ Graham Allen, "Transparency and Teaching," *Theory, Culture and Society* 23.2-3 (2006): 569.

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, "The University Without Condition", *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 214.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 204.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 205.

⁵⁰ Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, 47.