

Title: Telling the Story of Iberian Studies: Spaces of Convergence and the Defense of the Humanities

- Thank you to the members of the forum for 20th and 21st century Iberian Studies for organizing this panel. I welcome a moment of meta-discourse and self-reflection about the direction of our field
- What I hope to do here is to offer some very preliminary thoughts that seek to situate the field of Iberian Studies within the larger discourse about the crisis of the Humanities and the future of cultural studies. If my thoughts are preliminary, then my conclusions promise to be as well. I do not pretend to have answers, but I hope that this panel will serve as a point of departure for discussion and (hopefully) action.

While many in academia around the U.S. may anchor themselves in cynical opposition to the proliferation of neoliberal discourse and the policies that accompany, I propose that language departments are in a uniquely privileged position within the humanities to assert the value of our programs within the neoliberal paradigm. Specifically, the current field of Iberian Studies offers a model for departments in the Humanities to transition away from traditional curriculum, develop multidisciplinary connections, and rethink their mission within the political, economic, cultural, and academic landscape of the university. If we understand the broader field of cultural studies as a space of convergence of various theoretical and methodological approaches including mobility studies, sustainability studies, gender studies, tourism studies and much more, then Iberian Studies is uniquely able to tell the “story” of the Humanities and reassert its value (perceived and real) to upper administration, colleagues, students, and the community. This purpose of this paper is to offer the multidisciplinary approaches that characterize the field of contemporary Iberian Studies as potential strategies of resistance in and of themselves that defend the broader discipline of the Humanities. I assert that the “story”

of Iberian Studies underscores the Humanities as a space of convergence that is able to “go beyond” research for research’s sake to empower students, impact the public good, and even convince higher education leadership of the discipline’s value. However, it is up to us to defend the Humanities by telling that story.

In “The Sky is Falling,” published in *Profession* in May 2018, Eric Hayot begins his essay by questioning the language of crisis and by situating the current atmosphere of crisis in the humanities within a larger context of historical trends. What he sees through the MLA Job Information List is that the employment market has been cyclical with periods of recovery after times of economic downturn. Despite an overall downward trend, he states, one may be inclined to read the peaks and valleys of the job market in the humanities as a latent message to wait out the current crisis until the market stabilizes and “auto-corrects.” While Hayot recognizes the overall stability of the Humanities over the last 50 years, he asserts that the stability the Humanities has enjoyed has been hard fought and, moreover, the situation the discipline now faces is quite different from previous eras. Hayot points out that undergraduate enrollments in the Humanities have reached historically low numbers noted by a precipitous decline of 50% in humanities majors since 2010. In short, Hayot asserts, things are changing and they are changing quickly. Moreover, the structural causes for these changes lock the Humanities into a vicious circle. The causes, simply put, stem from cuts in state funding force universities to raise tuition while they also court international students as a revenue stream to mitigate losses, the higher tuition places a higher financial burden on students thus forcing them to seek out loans and prioritize degrees perceived to offer higher salaries more quickly after graduation, then international students whose native language is not English avoid majors

with intensive reading and writing. If the number of majors graduated and the number of credit hours generated are the coins of the realm, and speaking for state schools they most definitely are, then the declines in enrollment mentioned earlier both in the major and in general, lead to structural consequences: loss or non-renewal of faculty lines and dependence on contingent labor, budget cuts, program deactivations, lower or no research support, consolidation of academic units, etc. While society may be enjoying a peak after the valley brought on by crisis, the Humanities, Hayot, asserts, finds itself marginalized and vulnerable to financial decision-making whose gravitational pull they are unable to break free from and binds them to a continuing downward spiral of enrollment declines and budget cuts. As Lawrence Busch pointedly summarized in *Knowledge for Sale*, various strategies in tertiary education designed to increase or generate new revenue streams have shifted the financial burden of education from the State to students; re-conceptualized higher education as a vehicle for graduates to land a high-paying job; transformed scholarly research into an arena for increased competition; firmly established national and global competitive ranking systems among universities in hopes of increased funding and prestige; and increased the number, power, and salaries of administrators. As a result, “market-like changes have transformed the self-understanding and consequent behavior of students, scholars, and administrators” (Busch xvii) who now view education as a competitive for-profit enterprise.¹

Hayot’s answer to the question, “What can be done?” is two-fold. First, the responsibility for answer this question is on the shoulders of tenured and tenure track faculty,

¹ Chris Newfield, *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them and Unmaking the Public University: The Forty Year Assault on the Middle Class.* Edsall in NY Times.

not adjuncts and definitely not graduate students. Secondly, he states bluntly that we need to rethink what we are doing at the graduate and undergraduate levels. But, more than anything, we need to act. First, teach humanities, not disciplines. This way, Hayot explains, our programs answer big questions that humanity faces and address global issues that affect life on this planet. Such an approach might connect the student to a world beyond themselves but also arms them with a cultural literacy that will help them navigate the ambiguities and complexities of a so-called post-information globalized world. Second, experiment with classes, programs, curricula, and even assignments. Innovative and interdisciplinary classes with assignments that offer students the opportunity to enhance their skills in digital literacy to complement their advances in cultural literacy might break the mold in ways that engage and attract students, draw the (positive) attention of administrators, and even garner departments and faculty support to develop courses and programs. Hayot's last suggestion is that we justify and explain what we do by taking time in class for meta-discussions that explain the value of the humanities and inspire students to visualize what is possible when they think critically about the human condition.

In his *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* from 1989, Raymond Williams includes a chapter titled "The Future of Cultural Studies." Written in the aftermath of the recession of 1981 and in the midst of university budgetary crises plaguing institutions as Reagan/Thatcher-ist neoliberal policies expanded, Williams anticipates the end of the economic crisis but wonders what the reaction of academics will be: "Will we cheer that the budgetary crisis is over, the establishment crisis relieved a bit?" (161). If so, he asserts, then those who dedicate themselves to the field of Cultural Studies will have missed a historic opportunity to

engage the critical possibilities of the discipline to interrogate the human and social knowledge that underlie the political, economic, and academic institutions of society within the post-industrial capitalist framework. While he reflects positively on the development of diverse disciplines within the umbrella of Cultural Studies—media studies, popular fiction, music studies, etc—he worries that as fields become more specialized and sub-fields emerge, that Cultural Studies scholars may forget the “real project” (158). Williams is careful not to describe Cultural Studies as a “convergence” of intellectual disciplines because doing so, he states would lead to “uneven and scattered” results that focus solely on the evolution of the field from the point of view of intellectual history rather than offering a unified and unifying political enterprise. For Williams, the challenge facing the discipline of Cultural Studies is to maintain the political edge of intellectual work to confront societal norms (especially relevant in the age of “fake news”) but also to keep a critical eye focused on a meta-awareness of the field itself and its purpose as well as the teaching that stems from it.

Lawrence Grossberg, writing in another moment of social and economic crisis, retrieves the baton from Williams In *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (2010) and reasserts the relevance of cultural studies which lies, he argues, not only in its ability to do certain types of intellectual work and produce certain kinds of knowledge and understanding but at its core is “about the contemporary struggle over thought, imagination, and the possibilities for action as a part of the larger contextual struggles over modernity itself [...] modernity is the site and object of struggle” (2-3). Grossberg reiterates Williams’ concern about the dangers that beset the field of cultural studies if it falls prey to institutionalization and normalization and remains “too fractured, too partial, too isolated, too sure of its own practice, too removed from any

productive, collaborative conversation” (65). Yet, while Williams is hesitant to speak of the convergences within the discipline, Grossberg asserts that knowledge is an act within the world not a representation of it and the commitment of cultural studies is to illuminate the **conjunctures** entwined in any global problematic and to offer **conjectures** that explore possible solutions and mapping trajectories into other as yet unrealized futures (57-59). The challenge, he explains, is to become more self-aware of the project of cultural studies and to think beyond the “institutional constraints and habits” that we have grown accustomed to (67). The task is to tell a better story not only about the world and the possibilities for imagination to rethink it in a more humane and just way but about cultural studies itself as the discipline best equipped to question the complex forces that shape the world as well look inwardly to reimagine the field itself (71-73).

To visualize the terrain of the “crisis” of the humanities within the realm of language programs, specifically Spanish, I suggest we turn to the data found within the Language Enrollment Survey conducted every three years by the MLA. The results of the most recent survey conducted in 2016 were published on the MLA website in February 2018 alongside a short report that explained the parameters of the survey². Overall enrollments in languages from fall 2013 to fall 2016 suffered the second-largest decline in the history of the census with a drop of 9.2%. The combined drop from 2009 to 2016 is 15.3% which the authors of the report say clarifies any uncertainty about whether the decline in 2013 was an anomaly or the beginning of a continued trend. Spanish still represents the majority of enrollments in

² Survey of 2669 institutions of higher education, all are accredited, not-for-profit institutions, eleven month period of data collection with a 95.6% response rate. The results are published on the MLA website and the full data set is downloadable. The long report is due out soon.

languages in the U.S. at 50.2%, but that percentage has been decreasing consistently since 1998 when it was at 54.7%. Spanish enrollments in Fall 2016 dropped by 9.8% following a drop by 8.3% in 2013. Since 2006, the MLA survey has included questions that make distinctions between enrollments in introductory-level courses and advanced courses that may lead to minors or majors and may include courses taken as part of a professional preparation for careers in business, health professions, engineering, etc. The report details that the ratio for French, German, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish is at 5:1 indicating that for every five introductory enrollments there is one enrollment in an advanced course at the undergraduate level. This data is not exhaustive and does not mean that all programs have suffered losses, but rather the MLA Language Enrollment Survey serves as a canary in the coal mine that can alert us to potential crises and should generate discussions within our departments and across universities, but especially within our discipline to answer a series of questions about our ability to engage undergraduate and graduate students by addressing their valid concerns about career possibilities and future employability, reimagine curricular programming as well as alternative structures to majors/minors/graduate degrees, address the perception of value (or lack thereof) of or programs both within the university and outside academia, and advocate for our programs and our discipline by learning to speak what I have called elsewhere the “foreign” language of higher education leadership³. That is, rather than dismiss the neoliberal discourse so prevalent among university presidents, provosts, deans, and a multitude of other administrative titles, I suggest we engage our talents as experts in the study of language and

³ Jansa and Nichols

culture to communicate more effectively the “value” of our discipline in the face of declining enrollments.

To invoke Williams and Grossberg, what then is the future of Iberian Studies within the atmosphere of crisis in the Humanities that Hayot details? In recent years, much effort has been put forth to “theorize” Iberian Studies and “reconfigure” our field’s focus on things peninsular in order to put forth a more robust epistemological paradigm that is accompanied by more comprehensive methodological approaches. As many have written, the turn to Iberian Studies offers a vibrant strategy to upend the traditional hierarchies that have delineated orthodox practices from those considered heterodoxical and that have burdened us with supposedly unassailable assumptions regarding the centrality of the Castillian language in the peninsula, the intimate identification of nation and state, and the perception that Francoism alone is responsible for political and social disharmony (Delgado 43). What I propose, however, is that now that the contours that outline the *theory* of Iberian Studies and guide its epistemology seem more clearly in focus, perhaps we can discuss the *ontology* of the field before it becomes institutionally ossified. That Iberian Studies represents a field that is simultaneously translingual, transcultural, transnational, and transhistorical offers a narrative thread that not only liberates us from previous disciplinary shackles but more importantly offers a strategy to assert the value of its existence to students, colleagues, administrators, and the community.

The “Iberian Turn,” as Gimeno Ugalde puts it, offers an opportunity to explore Iberian Studies’ potential to intersect with other established or emerging fields such as Translation studies, Genre studies, Queer studies, Trans-Atlantic studies, Migration and Diaspora studies,

Digital humanities, etc. Certainly, current research on such themes as immigration and labor, history and human rights, global capital and local identity, urbanization and sustainability etc. underscore the relevance of Iberian Studies to address global issues and affirm humanistic inquiry as a valid academic discourse that not only complements the research of the social and natural sciences but often overlaps with them and may be seen as their ethical meta-critical conscience in certain ways. Such multidisciplinary approaches within Iberian Studies overlay seamlessly with recent innovations in foreign language pedagogy that advocate a focus on multiple literacies in which reading, writing, and speaking are enhanced with cultural as well as digital literacy⁴. It is interesting, then to revisit the 2007 MLA Ad-Hoc Committee Report through the lens of the recent transformations within Iberian Studies. The authors of the report titled “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World” offered a series of recommendations at a historical moment after 9/11 yet before the impact of a global financial crisis. The essence of the recommendations put forth by the committee members is that language departments hold foremost as their goal to endow students with translingual and transcultural competence so that they are taught “critical language awareness, interpretation and translation, historical and political consciousness, social sensibility, and aesthetic perception” (MLA p.?). Additionally, the authors urge departments to map a unified, four-year curricula that locates language study within “cultural, historical, geographic, and cross-cultural frames; that systematically incorporate transcultural content and translingual reflection at every level” (MLA). More recent reports like “Heart of the Matter” (2013) and “America’s Languages” (2017) from the American Academy of Arts & Sciences extol the value of humanities, specifically the study of language and culture, in its ability to transcend the barriers

⁴ Paesani, Maxim, Warner, Dupuy

between Academia and the public, prepare students to address global “grand questions” that face humanity, and to foster critical intercultural skills across all disciplines (Heart of the Matter 45-57).

While many criticize what humanists do as elitist, narrow, and irrelevant and public officials have dismissed the economic potential and material utility of a humanities major, writers like Peter Brooks, Doris Sommer, and Sidonie Smith in her book *Manifesto for the Humanities* (2016), insist that the key to transforming the discipline is to place high value on civic agency and public engagement⁵. Those who have “theorized” about the epistemological scaffolding of Iberian Studies have also expressed concern about the material conditions behind the symbolic changes within the field (Santana), the perceived scholarly prestige of the discipline (Delgado, Faber), the preparation of future generations of scholars (Santana), and the political implications behind the reconfiguration of the canonical archive (Pérez, Bermúdez). Yet, I wonder what is that “plus ultra” that will take us beyond the limits of our own discipline. If, as Bécquer suggests in the title of his paper, our charge as humanists is to engage the public, then we must seek out those spaces of convergence would uphold the belief that a public university is a public good that has the potential to redress structural social inequalities. The field of Iberian Studies is well-equipped to answer the questions posed by Raymond Williams and to educate students at all levels as conscientious global citizens able to navigate the ambiguities and contradictions of the modern world. Initiatives such as the MLA’s Connected Academics⁶ and recent developments at institutions like the University of Washington and the University of

⁵ Naussbaum, Hunter

⁶ Anthony Carnavale at Georgetown

Arizona to create programs focused on public and applied humanities offer Iberian Studies an opportunity to undertake a common enterprise. In her essay “‘If We Build It, Will They Come?’ Iberian Studies as a Field of Dreams,” Luisa Elena Delgado prompts the reader to think carefully about a potential common enterprise within Iberian Studies, “If we build a different field, where not only the name of the game is different, but actually the way it is played is different as well, what will be the symbolic but also material consequences? Will “they” come? Who will, in fact, come?” (43) The rules of the game, I would argue, are inescapably defined within the market driven parameters of neoliberal discourse that focus on data driven analytics, revenue generation, graduation rates, job placement, and other measures of a new managerial mindset. We must assume an entrepreneurial attitude, both in the Humanities and in Iberian Studies, that “justifies and explains” our existence, as Hayot suggests, through a compelling story that asserts the value-added of our field through the positive impact on society and the public good. In this game, not playing is not an option.

recounts her experience teaching a cultural analysis class in English...internal resistance from colleagues

...new neoliberal ecosystem....value

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The Fuzzy and the Techie by Scott Hartley

Knowing is obsolete. What students need is to learn how to operate in ambiguity, how to compartmentalize a problem, how to manipulate different tools to achieve different ends, but most of all engage in a depth of inquiry to ask better questions.

What we want to explore here is how does one apply the tools they acquired in their study of the humanities? What options are out there for careers both academic and non?

If we think of it in terms of “modalities”relational

Conclusion

Points of convergence....language enterprise....common enterprise

and how they may coalesce with pedagogical innovation offer a compelling narrative arc about the positive impact on society and the public good

Conscientious global citizens Cultural studies....social justice

Applied!

Time to rethink the major? MA? PhD?

UW

Rethink curriculum

But more than anything, rewrite the story we tell about ourselves

Neoliberal discourse

Tell the story: Hayot says “justify and explain”...Delgado recounts her experience teaching a cultural analysis class in English...internal resistance from colleagues

- Global Studies....data driven analytics to measure internationalization efforts....short study abroad and recruitment of students from abroad....students going and students coming....new model for study abroad is 1 week programs often in English
- Delgado....concern of colleagues about teaching in English....this is already happening

If we build a different field, where not only the name of the game is different, but actually the way it is played is different as well, what will be the symbolic but also material consequences? Will “they” come? Who will, in fact, come?

Thomas Edsall’s 2012 NY Times article “The Reproduction of Privilege” offers data to support this: Widening socio-economic chasm with repercussions in education. 74% of students enrolled in universities classified as the most competitive come from the top economic quartile.

Translation: the vast majority of students at the most elite schools come from the richest social class and those are the students who are studying languages, participating in

study abroad, honing their cultural competency. Where does this leave first generation students, students with high financial need, underrepresented students, students at community colleges, and other non-traditional students for whom these skills are equally, or even more, important.