

# Talking Heads / Cabezas Parlantes Series: Avatars of the Spanish Language in the Home of the Brave circa 2011. Talk by Prof. Fernando Gomez Herrero (Hispanic Studies).

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It could be the best of times and it could be the worst of times. In serious moments of genuine budget crisis, across-the-board downsizing and reconfiguration of what still amounts to be called "university knowledge," multilingual humanities are weathering the storm, ever so precariously. This is truly a "minority" affair, in more ways than one, for academic units typically treated as "service" departments. Language and language only, says the instrumentalist conception of language, with a bit of literature and culture, perhaps, for decoration purposes, but not too much. And how much is too much? Programs are being reduced, made ornamental decoration or even terminated. Hiring is taking place exclusively at lower levels with grotesque payment conditions. And instruction remains appallingly shallow exclusively in very modest literacy levels of literature-and-culture (no interpenetrations with the social sciences, no shadow of a thin presence in the natural sciences, etc.). How obsolete is this? With all other languages fighting for their institutional lives, Spanish remains alive and well holding hands with its bigger sister, English. Spanish --typically, "Hispanic and not white," in between "black and white" in the US racial typology, part of the West?, part of the Western Hemisphere?, mostly non-European dimension, "foreign," but not quite "foreign and out there" anymore, mostly popular culture than high culture-- may already claim national-language status in the land of the free, but not official status. This American conditioning is not automatic love affair however, also institutionally in the big, imperial country never fastidious about language-learning, and most rarely with a xenophilic disposition that most eagerly could welcome the re-arrangement of the conventional cultural furniture and dramatically change the average mindset. The totem and taboo of assimilation models are firmly called into question when no one single national unity can go it alone --think labor market-- and Hispanicization of the home of the brave continues apace, against grotesque underrepresentation of social sectors called "Hispanic," probably a misnomer that may or may not stick around. The Spanish language is in this messy vicinity, typically in anti-humanities environments, also anti-Hispanic, historically claiming bigger numbers and a richer diachronicity than Uncle Sam's. Uncensored, unfiltered, unplugged conversation with the students --bilingual if they wish! There will be food!