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Just Another Crisis? The Humanities from the Holocene to the Anthropocene

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[Rough draft!]

I

The title of this forum could be construed to be asking--in fact, it is asking--what is knowledge for and how should it be produced. That is not something to take on in 15 minutes. I also don't want to offer another list of the 101 things that the humanities do to make us better citizens, better managers, better workers, better humans—we have had tons of this sort of writing (*What happened to the Humanities?* (1999? PUP), *Reflecting on the Humanities* Daedalus 2009; *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Nussbaum 2010; *The Humanities and the Dream of America*, Harpham, 2011; *Rethinking the Humanities* 2012, etc.). Are new arguments about the glory of the humanities really going to make any difference? What else really is there left to say, in the abstract? (You can't do much better than Michael Wood's "A World without Literature?" in the Daedalus issue on the humanities.) I think all we can do is write better books and do better research and teach our students better. And thus allow practices and not professions do the job for us. (I also don't understand why the fate of the humanities is going to be changed if the general public has a better sense of what humanists do because humanists don't do things like mechanics, they do things like physicists. Their impact on the world is highly mediated, and that's how it should be.) On this occasion it would simply be preaching to the converted anyway. More important for me in this forum is to argue that the future of the university is to become a global university, every

one of them. And I want to suggest how this can be done by focusing on disciplines-areas, collaboration, and returning knowledge to those who first produced it. I focus on my own discipline, because it is the poster child for all that is wrong with the present university and all that can be made right in future one. My discipline now lies at the bottom of the Great Chain of Academic being: as a student of the non-western (strike one), the non-modern (strike 2), the philological (strike 3, you're out). I'll be brief about the first two points: 1. the nature of the current malaise in the humanities as a *global* question, especially (though not exclusively) as seen from the perspective of the most endangered form of humanistic knowledge—what I would call the basic science of the humanities—namely, philology, which I define as the discipline of making sense of texts; 2. the new gods that are supposed to rescue the humanities. I'd like to spend the greater share of my time on 3. The relations among areas (or regions or locations), disciplines and interdisciplinarity, and the need for redisciplining. Here I make some modest proposals—about which I'm not entirely kidding—that I think will make my sector of the humanities stronger both for students and for faculty.

* * *

I have sometimes thought that humanists have been talking about the crisis of the humanities ever since there were humanists. Consider what Robert Burton (in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*) had to say in 1621:

Our ordinary students ... apply themselves in all haste to those three commodious [i.e., profitable] professions of law, physic, and divinity, sharing themselves between them, rejecting these arts in the meantime, history, philosophy,

philology, or lightly passing them over, as pleasant toys fitting only table-talk, and to furnish them with discourse.¹

The humanities as supplying cocktail party material in Jacobean England, with the serious stuff happening in medicine and law: sounds very familiar (except that now law is in crisis too).

But if today's humanities crisis is just a reiteration, it is a pretty extreme one.² I want to say a few words about the statistics of crisis both in the US and globally, and then go on to address one (in my view) emblematic case—the study of non-western non-modern literature—and suggest how we might respond. [NB: This discussion cannot be about money: everyone is hurting for money³ and it's now a zero sum game. We can change the game, however, by changing the rules.]

Recent statistical studies (the “Humanities Indicators” project of the American

¹ Burton 2001: 309.

² The ACLS defines the humanities as “the study of human cultures, languages, and histories through the use of qualitative approaches.” Not very helpful. It is the *products* of human culture that the humanities studies.

³ Consider what is happening in biomedical research. Here's an excerpt from a petition circulating a few months ago to try to increase NIH funding: “The proposed flat NIH budget will severely exacerbate a catastrophic crisis that has been ongoing since 2003 ... promising careers have been cut short, amazing research projects have been aborted, hundreds of laboratories nationwide have shrunk or been shut down, established and accomplished senior researchers have been forced to abandon their programs, young scientists have departed from research or even left the country....”

Academy of Arts and Sciences—I'm referring to the summary prepared by my colleague David Brinkely) unequivocally reveal a decline in both absolute and relative support for research in humanistic scholarship that has been described, perhaps optimistically, as “dangerous.” The national budget for humanistic studies in the United States in general dropped from more than \$400 million in 1979 to less than \$150 million in the past two years. Humanities faculty have grown far more slowly than any other area; in fact, relative to other disciplines they have not grown at all (14 percent of the professoriate has been the steady figure for the past decade), and the number of full-time positions has shrunk dramatically to just over half in the same period. The humanities currently produce the lowest number of PhDs of all fields—8 percent, a 45 percent drop since the 1970s—and these figures include the outsized discipline of history.

For undergraduate education I can complement “Humanities Indicators” statistics with less systematic but still notable data of my own. I recently reviewed Duke’s department of Asian studies, and learned that well over half—perhaps the number was closer to three-quarters—of Duke undergraduates major in economics and public policy studies (with biomedical engineering, biology, and psychology as third, fourth, and fifth most popular majors). I found this figure unbelievable, but the National Center for Education statistics confirms it, and really gives you a sense of how much the humanities matter, or don't. “In 2009–10 [the latest year for which statistics are available], more than half of the 1.7 million bachelor's degrees awarded [in the US] were in five fields: business, management, marketing, and personal and culinary services (22 percent); social sciences and history (10 percent); health professions and related programs (8 percent); education (6 percent); and psychology (6 percent).” (Humanities Indicators: “When degrees are counted using the NSF’s categories, the humanities’ share of bachelor’s

degrees in 2010, 7.6%, was less than half of the 1967 high.”) “Of the 693,000 master's degrees awarded in 2009–10, over 50 percent were concentrated in two fields: education and business (26 percent each).” The figures for MAs in major humanities disciplines are minute, around 5 percent total (English 3.9 percent; Foreign languages and literatures 1.3 percent; Philosophy and religious studies 0.7 percent).

II

The public defunding and institutional depopulation of the humanities certainly seems dramatic, but it is not evenly dramatic. While all of the humanities may be suffering to some extent, the suffering is highly stratified by space and time. The hardest hit are those fields that study the non-modern (one strike) and the non-West (two strikes); add literary studies to the non-modern non-West and the humanist strikes out—occupying a location at the very bottom of the Great Chain of Academic Being. Only a tiny fraction of that 8 percent of humanities PhDs recorded in the “Humanities Indicators” are taken in classical studies, even according to the broadest definition, “global premodern language-based studies”: the total of non-English language and literature PhDs in relationship to all PhDs (and this includes modern as well as premodern) dropped by two-thirds from the mid-1970s to the present. The impact of this is not too hard to imagine, but let me give you a concrete fact—or what I think is a fact—relating to comparative literature departments: I calculate that 90 per cent of graduate education and research in the field in the US today is directed toward a mere 3 per cent of human literary experience.⁴

⁴ 400 of 4000 years, 1/3 of the world; 90 per cent is a compromise between 85% non-modern non-western at the major centers and (likely) 95% elsewhere.

So not only are the humanities disappearing from the postsecondary scene of American education, they are disappearing in radically unequal ways, and undergoing a stunning provincialization not only of space but also of time. The reproduction of the population of scholars in the US responsible for understanding, curating, and transmitting a vast area of historical human culture stands in an almost exact inverse proportion to the magnitude and importance of the object.

III

If the US is prioritizing counting over reading, there is still something of a commitment to a liberal arts education of a sort. Elsewhere, the situation is far worse. In some place we are witnessing the actual extinction of the capacity for certain kinds of humanistic work. Let me look at two areas in particular, SA and Africa.

I wish I had time to describe the situation in South Asia in detail, but let me just give you a synopsis. (There are no good statistics on the situation here; I am relying on my own research over the past 30 years.) In India, which as recently as the midnight of freedom from colonial rule in 1947 could boast of world-class academic achievement in dozens of classical literary languages, it is today next to impossible to identify scholars who have deep competence in any. I predict that within 30 years the number of people capable of reading the historical languages of India—three thousand years of literature in a dozen languages, the longest continuous and richest multicultural literary record in world history—will have reached a statistical zero. More broadly viewed, the humanities have become the last resort of the least talented.⁵

⁵ students are forced into science and professional streams right at the school level.

“Nowadays,” says a colleague in Manipal attempting to create an alternative MA

With regard to Africa (here I'm grateful to Suren Pillay, Acting Director at the Center for Humanities Research at U. of the Western Cape): the Carnegie Endowment recognized four years ago that "at many institutions of higher education in Africa there is serious debate about whether the humanities can thrive or even continue to exist." As in India—though networks of communication among humanists in Africa seem much better developed than in SA—there are few life chances for humanities graduates; they study it because they have not been admitted to study anything else: "Most of the torrent of students in humanities classes really would rather be someplace else." \$5 for the

program, "coaching classes for the IITs and state engineering exams start from 8th standard onwards. The alienation with arts and humanities begins at that age." India still has a vast undergraduate pool of students studying for the BA [which in India is non-professional, but even this is mostly sociology, political science, and history], perhaps 40 percent of the population, the vast majority of them girls. "The sad truth is that BA has actually become a stop-gap arrangement on the eventual path to marriage for these girls." And the quality of these courses is typically abysmal: "The BA courses have now become so functional that today English literature – even in good colleges – has been reduced to communicative English and how to email." Philosophy is taught almost nowhere in the country, with the exception of Delhi and Kolkata (where over 90% of the students are girls. "Although difficult to believe, it is probably true, as one teacher there pointed out, that for girls this is part of the marriage market"). The Sanskrit education industry is often appalling. One of my students from India received a BA, MA, and MPhil in Sanskrit—and cannot read the language at all. Like millions of others, she has been defrauded of an education.

development of scholarly capacity in the humanities (doctoral, postdoctoral, networks, etc.)

In the Middle East: “The situation of the humanities in higher educational institutions is dismal, with few exceptions. There are several problems hindering the humanities in the Arab world which include in non-ranked order: 1) a culture of rote memorization and no critical engagement with texts; 2) authoritarian and religious politics that forbid criticism or deviation from established narratives; 3) scholarship that produces lists of facts (annalistic narratives) with no analytical framework for understanding these; 4) no good job prospects for students in the humanities and the brightest male students are guided toward the hard sciences (the doctor or engineer syndrome) where jobs are more secure, better paying and generate a higher social status. Bright women either do the same as the male students (doctors or engineers) or if they study the humanities, they end up with bad jobs or become housewives.” (B. Heykel)

[Iran: The humanities have invariably suffered over the last three decades because of the purging of the universities of scholars unsympathetic to the ideological hegemony of Islamism--the state has in fact specifically targeted social sciences and the humanities, and tried to "Islamicize" them, particularly after the Green Movement. Khamenei ordered the islamization of the humanities since he thought the humanities were the source of his troubles (Dabashi).]

Not so knowledgeable about SEA. But colleagues in Indonesia, Cambodia, and V-N have spoken to me of the “Singapore model” of development. Here governments are learning that to achieve the success of Singapore that are being told to that you do not need and cannot afford the humanities (as in Singapore, where the history requirement

has been eliminated from high schools). We shouldn't be fooled by the presence of an NUS, which they describe to me as mere mimicry of ... well, Harvard.

[Philippe Peycam: "My understanding of the Singapore model is fragmentary but based on my experience of living in the place. If you need something more substantial, I can ask some of my friends who work at NUS. They have a lot of stories to tell.

In general, I believe the Singaporean techno-political Nomenklatura made an early choice, based on 1960s developmentalist cannons that education should of the Singaporeans should first and foremost be framed to serve the economic interests of the newly born city-state. They stressed the importance of hard sciences and in particular maths. In language, the crucial choice was to promote English rather than Chinese or Malays as the country's lingua franca. This bias in favor of maths and "useful" scientific knowledge has turned into a leitmotiv for the authorities who relegated speculative intellectual pursuits to some university ghettos with a growing attempt at curtailing basic education in literature, philosophy or history to the point of making them "facultative" items at high school. This means that the overall Singapore population has been made estranged to capacities to think critically and openly about issues surrounding their lives. This has nonetheless created the new problem, identified by the country's leaders, that Singaporeans lagged behind in terms of "creativity". Now, they are pushing for the introduction of elitist activities like cultural and art events, investments in museums and indeed, the support of a university sector which, with NUS and NTU constitute the main spaces where intellectual activities are conducted. This fragmentation and functionalization of creative/humanistic knowledge has led to the constitution of ghettos where foreign -- imported -- elements, mostly from the US, but now increasingly from China and India dominate.

Metaphorically, the realization of this state of things came to me when on the occasion of the 2002 ICAS convention which was organized in Singapore, I saw international scholars on various fields in the humanities and social sciences freely discussing concepts of "public sphere", "identity", "cosmopolitanism", etc. in the premises of a commercial hotel-tower that was standing above a shopping mall that was packed with Singaporean consumers: intellectuals can freely talk so long as their role is confined to hermetically closed bubbles, with absolutely no contacts or consequences to society in general.

I also realized this technocratic anti-intellectual stand on the part of the Singaporean elite when, as director of an academic/capacity building NGO in Cambodia, I was trying to promote training in basic humanities in Cambodian universities. One of my board members, a Cambodian-Singaporean, always criticized my emphasis on training historians, cultural anthropologists, etc., claiming that Cambodia should instead follow the "Singaporean model" and its focus on hard sciences, stating that my trained people would end up jobless and eventually turn politically subversive. He was here contradicting another board member, Cambodian, and art historian, who wanted the country to regain as soon as possible a substantial group of "writers, historians, artists, etc.", so as to reconstitute a basis for an autonomous public sphere of critical inquiry for the service of their citizens. His point was: even if out of 10 PhDs only 2 find jobs, the other 8 will contribute in other ways to rebuild the base of a public debate. The choice there were very clear and it is interesting that the Singapore model was as such both promoted and contested by Cambodian intellectuals.]

The one exception is China. China has made the calculation that the liberal arts in general and the humanities in particular count. See docs in NYC. Fudan Institute for

Advanced Humanistic Study. But also of course Taiwan, which for long had gone its own way (Academia Sinica).

The same is increasingly true even in Europe, which was the first world region to institutionalize the discipline. In 1969, Erich Auerbach, who has been viewed as the consummate practitioner of philology—whatever definition we may chose—of the post World War II era, warned of the imminent disappearance of philology, describing its loss as “an impoverishment for which there can be no possible compensation.” And the situation today bears out his warning, where academic posts in philology—classical, Semitic, Romance, South Asian, East Asian—are disappearing in every country in the European Union with every passing year. A small but exemplary case is Syriac—the language that bridged the Greek and Arabic worlds—which is no longer taught anywhere on the continent. (Abolition of the classics dept. at Royal Holloway, U. of London; disappearance of the sole paleography position in the UK, etc., etc.)

III

Bigger contexts, in the US:

Universities are seriously confused about regions and how to organize knowledge about them: about regions and disciplines, about what each one is and how each should related to the other, and where to go from what seems to me the current state of paralysis.

Area-based social sciences exiled from disciplines, which then colonized the area-based humanities.

Areas, the studies phenomenon, and the exclusion of the humanities; new vertical silos instead of horizontal conversations

And to have no one from the rest of the world on this forum: for the fate of the humanities is about its fate globally.

The bigger context: problem-driven research, not knowledge-driven research: no need to learn to read if all you have to do is count. Calhoun: “As a broad pattern, foundation leaders have always sought to improve the human condition. They once believed that investing in social science generally, and area studies in particular, was a superb way to do this. By the 1990s few believed any more that this was efficient, even if they still thought social science or area studies to be good in themselves. Today, most prefer to try to work directly to pursue change, usually without any lengthy detour through attempts to improve knowledge. They prefer to work on specific problems—AIDS, women’s education, small-business support—but not necessarily on the larger contexts in which those problems are embedded.”

In Asia and Africa:

The big epistemological-political questions of the non-western humanities after colonialism. Astonishing vitality followed by indifference and collapse.

India: The situation is certainly not the result of colonial development of humanistic underdevelopment—the academic study of Indian literatures composed before 1800 achieved their high-water mark in the fifty years prior to independence. It is the result of a massive state commitment to industrialization, and the instrumentalization of education to that end.

Africa: The crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, according to Carnegie, is a result of the defunding of higher education at the insistence of IMF and WB in 1986; economic downturn, political turmoil, the consequent brain drain (both external and internal), massive teaching loads for faculty who are left.

IV

Is there however a new humanities currently under construction that will render

everything I've just said meaningless? In a very real sense, there is something not a little bit melancholy about having people like me in the twilight of their careers trying to grasp a world that is dawning, one so radically in transition that it bears almost no resemblance to the world in which they have lived out their careers. Anyone in a university humanities department today is confronting at least three areas of innovation, which I am sure others will address today, that some think will change the culture of the humanities and secure its future, but which at the same time are demographically marked: Let me touch on each very briefly, again with the proviso that it is someone around the bend and not on the cutting edge who is speaking.

Except perhaps regarding the first area, which is Digital Humanities. My work as a Sanskritist has been transformed in the past five years by the presence of vast quantities of digitized material. I am now working with colleagues at Columbia and Heidelberg on a joint NEH/DFG grant to produce digital editions and prosopographical databases using these editions. But far from being a new form of knowledge the digital humanities that I am familiar with is simply a mechanized way of doing what we philologists have always done; it is a tool of the humanities, not a different form or substance of the humanities. Big data does not ask you questions; it only answers questions that you bring to it, and those questions emerge out of prior, foundational, forms of humanistic knowledge. [Indeed, even the pattern recognition that some call a new literacy is precisely what is taught in philology.]

[Word usage frequency tools, Google Ngram viewer, "culturnomics" (<genomics); Amazon reader data: "They know how fast you read because you have to click to turn the page," says Cindy Cohn, legal director at the nonprofit Electronic Frontier Foundation. "It knows if you skip to the end to read how it turns out." "They

could tell you with precision the age, the zip codes, gender and other interests of the people who bought my books. Now you can throw on top of that the fact that a certain number of them quit reading at Page 45." Some in the publishing industry look forward to a new age of "social reading," in which devices allow readers to share their reactions with each other. And the author might be interested in seeing a graph of the page-turns of thousands of people as they read his latest novel.

c. 2000 SKSEC database; digital humanities grant from NEH/DFG, and I hope to learn whether big data can produce new questions and not just answer old ones. e.g., Moretti, "style at the scale of a sentence" presupposes a theory of style.]

Neurolit, Darwinian or evolutionary literary criticism, and related studies are another if more interesting attempt to turn the humanities into science. I have nothing against such studies, and am as happy to accept the slogan of cognitive philology—"The point is not the text, but the mind that made it"—as I've always accepted its reverse (if minds generate texts, texts also generate minds—ideas). [Cladistics from evolutionary biology applied to textual criticism.] But to the degree these studies are interesting and revelatory is the degree to which they cease to be humanities—and in any case falls victim to the same problems of inter-disciplinarity that I'll discuss in a moment.

MOOCs have potential – I see that Harvard is now beginning to experiment here with Greg Nagy's course on the hero in Greek literature; and I am planning one for Sanskrit at Columbia, hoping especially to target students in India, where Sanskrit is often taken to fulfill the three-language requirement for high school students, but where the Sanskrit industry ensures that none of them learn anything at all. And the numbers are mindblowing, as I learned from Pauline Yu's recent letter from the ACLS: 50,000 registrants for a classical mythology course at Penn; 70,000 for a course in world history

at Princeton. But let's not kid ourselves, there are real issues here. Let me raise three: First, MOOCs are no panacea—and they are not so new. There has long been another kind of Massive open if not online course in existence called a BOOK: let's make these available online, with subsidies to university presses—here's where the National Digital Public Library comes in. Second, MOOCs are like digital humanities, they are tools and techniques, not arguments and ideas, and only add a new level to the humanities game, but don't of themselves change any of the rules. Third and most worrisome, humanities scholarship of the non-West, like the humanities of the non-West, is already profoundly marginalized in the West, where African, ME, or SA scholars rarely get to publish in peer-reviewed journals or presses, and where their disciplinary horizons, research agendas, and often their very epistemologies are already being shaped by dependency on Euro-American funding. How much more difficult will it be for our humanities colleagues in Africa and Asia if African history or Asian literature is taught not locally but from the metropolitan center? And this issue is especially important in the humanities for how Asians interpret their literature or Africans their history *is part of the object of study*. What these scholars think about statistics or physics, by contrast, has nothing to do with their time and place.) Why even bother to develop a humanities capacity except in edX, Coursera, and Udacity? American farmers can produce two or three types of corn more cheaply than farmers in Mexico can produce their 90 species of corn. We need the latter for profound reasons of diversity, not just as a political or social value but as a biological value. In the same way we need the views on the humanities of our colleagues in China, India, Egypt, and Nigeria. Rather than MOOCs as a one-way street, we could move toward collaborative courses, or indeed, virtual universities. If the humanities are going to matter to the future university, they will matter in part because we have begun to

engage the people from the studied regions. “At the end of the day, they need to be made co-custodians of the accumulated knowledge that concerns them” (Philippe Peycam).

V

The fate of the humanities is to some degree tied up with the world outside the university and jobs for graduates of the humanities. How does one make clear that critical thinking, oral and written proficiency, engagement with other cultures, intellectual discipline—indeed, the focus on the values and moral imagination that makes humans human—are produced above all by the humanities? Humanists may not have done a good job in explaining this—we went through a period of deeply anti-democratic high obscurantism in the last 20 years—and we can do better, though I would note that basic science is usually not asked to do the same explaining.

New jobs that derive from humanistic training and research can help address the life-chance problem I spoke of. (Language and speech technology, which is now a growth industry in Holland.) But again, basic science cannot always defend itself on the grounds of application.

But the fate of the humanities is also, to a degree, tied up with the world inside the university: what can we do to ensure not only that students gain the skills that the humanities have to offer but also that the inheritance of 5000 years of human consciousness and creativity are not irrevocably lost?

[Media and communication studies seem to be growing, while language, literature, and non-western studies are fading. What is the obligation of those disciplines to transform themselves? What is the obligation of the university to recognize that certain forms of knowledge should not be subject to cycles of fashion.]

It does not, then, appear as if anything is going to save the humanities than the

humanities themselves. The fact that what I do in my classrooms is not, materially or technologically (though not, I would insist, conceptually) different in form from what has been done for centuries, is not argument against its value. People have been making love in rather similar ways for a rather long time too. But is the product of the humanities as unequivocally worthy as making love?

What about the Beethoven in Buchenwald problem? What about, in particular, the relationship between philology and race science recently re-asserted as an argument against the field (by the director of the National Humanities Center, no less). Put more broadly, what about George Steiner's old worry about whether the humanities humanize? Why care if the past has a future? It often seems that it is not those who forgot the past who are condemned to repeat it, but precisely those who remember it. Why don't we finally throw off the tradition of all the dead generations that weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living

Can we afford the humanities, at 5 minutes to midnight of the planet's life? Can we not afford it? What is sustainable development for – though I think development is, inherently, not-sustainable, so let's just call it sustainability – if not for the experiencing the rich level of human being that the humanities offer? What do we do once we are sustained?

Philology from the Holocene to the Anthropocene: this was to have been my title, if Homi had wanted titles. My point with this little bit of pretentiousness is to seize your attention about the threat we face now. Despite Burton and the following four centuries of hand-wringing, I do believe we are now facing a situation with respect to philology that no one has faced since texts began to appear with writing 5000 years ago in the middle of the Holocene. The rise of the Anthropocene seems to threaten the extinction not

just of biological species but of humanistic species, too.⁶ And like climate change culture change of this sort would seem to require the end of business as usual.

[Housman: “Everyone has his favourite study, and he is therefore disposed to lay down, as the aim of learning in general, the aim which his favourite study seems specially fitted to achieve, and the recognition of which as the aim of learning in general would increase the popularity of that study and the importance of those who profess it.” But we are not talking about favorites here but about the survival of the very capacity of human beings to read their pasts and, indeed, their presents, and thus to preserve a measure of their humanity.]

For analytical reasons I want to separate questions of undergraduate education from those relating to graduate education and the formation of the next generation of the humanities educators, though obviously the kind of teaching we get is determined by the kind of professors we train. With regard to undergraduate education, some of the practices and values we want the humanities to inculcate could be addressed by a modest proposal for an across the board, Gramscian-style classics-for-all requirement (I'm only partly kidding about this).

Gramsci and the learning of hard, useless languages. If you don't think philology

⁶ I'll say nothing about but only record the fact that of the approximately 7500 languages still spoken on the planet, 90% expected to become extinct by 2050. “We are living at the point in human history where, within two generations, most languages in the world will die out.... Language loss is generally irreversible and has no known positive outcomes.” (Manifesto, Foundation for Endangered Languages).”

A good number of these languages are in South Asia.

in the big sense--the discipline of making sense of texts--then think about the place of texts in our culture--the Constitution, the Bible--and ask yourself what kind of sense we can make of these texts without some organized conception of history, meaning, interpretation, and language in general. "Words mean what they mean," says Justice Scalia. This man needs to take Philology 101. ("Scalia said he reads the text of the Constitution in a literal manner, a method in which the "plain and ordinary meaning" of the text guides interpretation. "Words mean what they mean."--speech at Vanderbilt U. 2005).

With regard to graduate education, I would argue for a serious recommitment to-- or, better, a re-disciplining of--disciplinarity in the humanities to complement the proliferation of the "studies" phenomenon ("shadow disciplines") and the demand for interdisciplinarity. I offer by way of example a new-old discipline of critical philology designed to ground text-based forms of knowledge.

--What is a future discipline? How is a humanities discipline like philology *more* disciplined than any other. Why disciplines? Critique of interdisciplinarity.

What are the minimal requirements that successful applicants for admission to the twenty-first-century temple of disciplinarity will have to meet if they are to qualify as core knowledge forms? One would likely be historical self-awareness. Twenty-first century disciplines cannot remain arrogantly indifferent, as the teleological social sciences often appear to be, to their own historicity, constructedness, and changeability—this is an epistemic necessity, not a moral one—and accordingly, the humbling force of genealogy must be part and parcel of every disciplinary practice. A second would non-provinciality. Disciplines can no longer be merely local forms of knowledge that pass as universal under the mask of science; instead, they must emerge from a new global, and

preferably globally comparative, episteme and seek global, and preferably globally comparative, knowledge. A third requirement is methodological and conceptual pluralism. Understanding by what means and according to what criteria scholars in past eras have grounded their truth claims must be part of—not the whole of, but a part of—our own understanding of what truth is, and a key dimension of what we might call our epistemic politics.

No aspirant for inclusion in the twenty-first century disciplinary order could satisfy these historical, global, and methodological-conceptual requirements better than philology. Philology is constitutively concerned with the history of its own practices; transregional in its existence, and, in its modern Western avatar, comparative in its objects of study, perhaps the first systematically comparative discipline (though this is an aspect of modern philology and one that dramatically differentiates it from its premodern form); and based squarely on the confrontation with multiple forms of understanding. If like mathematics philology is a method, it is also, like mathematics, a discipline, aiming—or having the as yet untapped potential to aim—toward “analytic perspectives that disaggregate complex phenomena into potential general variables, relationships, and causal mechanisms” (Calhoun) and one that would grow in strength the greater its historical scope of operation is allowed to function.

-- includes everything from paleography, codicology, and textual criticism, to hermeneutics, literary comparison, history, and theory

The future of the university is dependent on the future of the humanities, and that is dependent on the future of philology. Why should we not create this space for the possible re-invention of this discipline, this basic science of the humanities?

For these reasons I would argue that all appointments should be joint

appointments between humanities disciplines and areas (Wallerstein et al. for the professoriate...); all Ph.D.'s should be joint Ph.D's. We cannot have a proliferation of tiny national or area literature or civilization departments. Numbers count. All social scientists should be jointly appointed in areas, and all area literature people should be jointly appointed in a critical philology department. People who think together should talk together, systematically. The "studies" need to reclaim the disciplines, and (re)invent disciplines where necessary.

As for importance of the humanities, again, actions speak louder than words. If we can grasp what was so threatening about the Buddhas of Bamiyan that the Taliban had to blow them up, and so precious about the Arabic and local-language manuscripts of Timbuktu that people risked their lives to save them from predators and marauders, we will understand the role of the humanities in the future university.

The humanities are unsafe for much of the world where power maintains itself because people do not know how to think critically. The social sciences do not ask the hard questions: who am I, what is life for. By definition they ask questions about the social not about the human, about the contingent not the ontological. Many societies do not want the dangerous questions of the humanities. The humanities do not solve problems, they make problems—problems essential to the health of creative societies.

humanities and the invitation to interpret

If **real education**, as the sociologist Andrew Abbott, a former colleague at Chicago, once put it, consists in finding “many and **diverse** new meanings to attach to whatever events or phenomena we examine,”

Within the university itself there has come about a new Great Chain of Academic Being, as I've taken to calling it, where those old questions don't count at all. From one

perspective, everyone in this room is at the bottom of this chain. When Leon Botstein, one of the few humanist presidents in American higher education today, summarizes the problems besetting the university by announcing that “the country needs more scientists and engineers” and not, “and also better readers,” we know we are in trouble. Is “the most terrifying problem in American university education” really “the profound lack of scientific literacy for the people we give diplomas to who are not scientists or engineers”? Or is it at least partially the profound lack of social, political, and moral literacy—and all else that comes from what Thoreau called “reading well,” that is, reading “true books in a true spirit”—in those people we give diplomas to who are not students of reading?

Some of us have sought to climb higher up The Chain by replacing our old questions with new ones in alliance with information technology or more recently cognitive science or neurology or evolutionary psychology (these are the only sorts of humanistic things that make news—NYT loves Humanities 2.0 and Neuro Lit Crit). Those of us who are less concerned with *actual* reading (which is not to say that actual reading is not interesting) than with *actualizing* readers—those of us who may make full use of technology but realize that our *core* questions are non-technological—remain at the bottom.