

Engaged Alienation: SoTL, Inclusivity, and the Problem of Integrity

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The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) defines itself as an inclusive field of study, and scholars have long lauded its ability to engage academics from each and every discipline. Yet SoTL's research culture has long been dominated by a narrow conception of social science. As a result, the lived experience of scholars from other disciplines, particularly the humanities, is one of engaged alienation. The borders created by SoTL's research paradigm are invisible to those within and somewhat impenetrable to those who are othered by virtue of their disciplinary identities. This paper interrogates the contradictions between SoTL's espoused values and values-in-use.

THE PROMISE OF INCLUSIVITY

By introducing SoTL, Boyer and others sought to elevate the study of teaching to a critical form of scholarship open to exploration, development, exchange, reflective critique, and social improvement (Boyer, 1990; Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997; Huber & Hutchings, 2006; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999) – all goals of traditional disciplinary research. The difference between SoTL and the more traditional academic disciplines, however, lies in the composition of its group of scholar-practitioners. All scholars, from all disciplines, across the academy, are welcome to join the idyllic, always growing, ever-supportive “teaching commons”, a conceptual space where “educators committed to pedagogical inquiry and innovation come together to exchange ideas about teaching and learning” (Huber & Hutchings, 2006, p. 26); and where instructors can collectively construct “trading zones” (Galison, 1997), essentially bridging all disciplinary boundaries in the pursuit of a common purpose: the advancement of teaching and support of learning (Boose & Hutchings, 2016; Hubball & Clarke, 2010; Huber & Morreale, 2002). Inclusivity and interdisciplinarity emerged as critical components of SoTL's conceptual foundation, the culture that developed around it, and the self-identities of its scholar-practitioners. Indeed, the definition of SoTL that we use to articulate our conception of the discipline treats inclusivity and interdisciplinarity as essential: “the systematic study of teaching and learning, using established or validated criteria of scholarship, to understand how teaching (beliefs, behaviours, attitudes, and values) can maximize learning, and/or develop a more accurate understanding of learning, resulting in products that are publicly shared for critique and use by an appropriate community” (Potter & Kustra, 2011, p. 2). Note that this definition does not favour any discipline or research paradigm, and explicitly refers to investigations of both empirical and non-empirical phenomena.

However, as has previously been established in Potter and Wuetherick (2015), SoTL has become a social science discipline within the larger research paradigm common to the social sciences. From this paradigm, SoTL draws disciplinary and meta-disciplinary elements that define and therefore limit the practices its scholar-practitioners consider legitimate. These elements – including but not limited to assumptions, patterns of interpretation, principles, research methodologies, norms of relevance and salience, key questions and problems to be solved, conceptual preoccupations, theories, ideologies, models, conceptions of what consti-

tutes evidence, and goals – both characterize the discipline of SoTL internally and set borders that distinguish it externally from other disciplines, even its conspecifics in the larger social science paradigms. All of these elements contribute to traditions that serve to maintain stability and coherence at SoTL's disciplinary nucleus while simultaneously providing means for gatekeeping at the borders where new elements are introduced. The elements that define SoTL generate concepts of “normal scholarship,” which belong in SoTL – and everything else, which doesn't. Kuhn (1962/1996) argues that the development and reification of a paradigm is the hallmark of a mature science (or discipline, or field of study, or form of scholarship). SoTL, as we see it, had already become a mature discipline by the turn of the century (for more detail on this claim, see Potter & Wuetherick, 2015).

That SoTL has become a social science discipline within a larger social science paradigm we therefore take as established. In this essay we focus instead on the *culture* of SoTL. By culture we mean the traditions, norms, customs, rituals, values, behaviours, ideologies, and institutions that a) bind SoTL's scholar-practitioners together; b) influence the choices and behaviours of SoTL scholar-practitioners *qua* SoTL scholar-practitioners; c) partially determine how SoTL practitioners interpret, predict, perceive, and otherwise create meaning from experiences perceived as relevant to SoTL; and, d) shape the identities of SoTL scholar-practitioners *qua* SoTL scholar-practitioners. That is, culture is a way of life that influences and limits how people within it experience and interact with the world. SoTL's culture is influenced by its disciplinary norms and paradigmatic elements, yet it is also phenomenologically and practically distinct for purposes of analysis.

Like all cultures, the culture of SoTL includes moral and political values along with behavioural norms its scholar-practitioners consider meaningfully attached to those values. As is the case with every culture, those within SoTL culture are not always conscious of their cultural norms until they are violated, at which point awareness is forced upon them. Much of the time, cultural norms operate as implicit unspoken expectations, acquired unconsciously through acculturation processes. We've had many private conversations and informal consultations with SoTL practitioners from the social sciences who comment that they are unaware, in their reviewing of SoTL conference and journal submissions, that they may be excluding scholar-practitioners from disciplines that do not adhere to social science norms and methodologies. When reminded of SoTL's cultural norms as they are openly articulated,

promoted, even celebrated in SoTL's literature, conferences, workshops, and induction events, many have become aware of their inherent bias, and expressed dismay.

Following Potter and Wuetherick's (2015) adaptation of ideas first articulated by Argyris, Putnam, and Smith (1985), we distinguish between espoused values and values-in-use. The former include the values members of a culture *perceive* and *believe* themselves to be manifesting and enacting in behaviour; the latter include the values they are *actually* manifesting and enacting in behaviour. SoTL's espoused values include inclusivity and interdisciplinarity. Its scholar-practitioners tend to perceive SoTL as a welcoming community open to scholars from anywhere and everywhere in academia. SoTL's scholar-practitioners identify with these values: they're critical to how they understand the discipline, and how they distinguish SoTL from most other disciplines.

The intended consequences of SoTL's espoused values are most certainly laudable: the creation of a Big Tent discipline in which all scholars would be welcome and all disciplinary research methods would contribute. SoTL advocates and leaders, unsurprisingly, have used the espoused values strategically in marketing the discipline to scholars worldwide. As a result, the values have contributed to SoTL's growth, attracting scholars from all corners of the academy – including the authors of this paper – who have grown tired of disciplinary silos and the dominant academic ethos of exclusion.

THE INTEGRITY PROBLEM

Since the late 1990s, SoTL has been reifying its paradigmatic and disciplinary elements, galvanizing a culture of oppression, discrimination, and exclusion by favouring and prioritizing social science methodologies, conventions, concepts, theories, assumptions, principles, frameworks, and even questions (Potter & Wuetherick, 2015). As such, SoTL's values-in-use are not consistent with its inclusive and interdisciplinary espoused values. Morally the state of espousing one set of values while enacting another is known as a hypocrisy, a state that exists in opposition to integrity. SoTL, then, has an integrity problem that manifests in a firm commitment to a narrow social science research paradigm and discipline, an unfortunately scientific ideology, and a culture of discrimination against scholars from the humanities. Yet, since SoTL uses its espoused values to lure new scholar-practitioners into its culture, "humanists drawn in by the inclusive vision feel like victims of a bait-and-switch" (Potter & Wuetherick, 2015, p. 13).

We do not believe this state of affairs is conscious or deliberate; people are often unaware that their values-in-use contradict their espoused values (Tagg, 2003). As Bourdieu notes, "[a] group of people participating in a regulated activity, an activity which without necessarily being the product of obedience to rules, obeys certain regularities" (as cited in Lamaison & Bourdieu, 1986, p. 113). When we occupy positions of privilege in a culture – that is, when the culture accepts, benefits, and validates us – we are often unable to see the borders of that culture, what and who it excludes. Its norms are, well, "normal" to us, and we may find ourselves forgetting that there are other ways to perceive and act. Cultures limit our field of vision. What isn't relevant or salient to the culture becomes invisible to us as we acculturate to and identify with that culture. As scholar-practitioners are initiated and acculturated into SoTL, they learn the espoused values as an ideal and ostensible reality while also learning the values-in-use, implicit and unseen, that push the espoused values ever-farther

into the realm of fantasy. The exclusionary and oppressive norms of SoTL become accepted as "given", normal elements of what it means to be a scholar-practitioner in this discipline. They aren't questioned because they aren't noticed.

A major contributor to SoTL's integrity problem is that the scholar-practitioners who function as gatekeepers tend to come from home disciplines that share SoTL's social science research paradigm, making the values-in-use especially invisible to them even when they were SoTL initiates. And yet, in envisioning their conceptual, somewhat idyllic "teaching commons", Huber and Hutchings (2006) warned against alienation, calling on SoTL gate-keepers to remember that inclusivity is central to SoTL's identity: "openness... requires that journal and newsletter editors, conference organizers, grant proposal reviewers, the like should recognize that scholars with different backgrounds, asking a wide range of questions and using a variety of methods, can make valuable contributions to the teaching commons" (p. 30). Even if these scholar-practitioners become aware of the exclusionary consequences of their gatekeeping, they're likely to see them as reasonable and acceptable. The "normal scholarship" they understand naturally excludes the alien practices of the humanities. This has, in fact, been a problem in SoTL from the beginning; although envisioned by Boyer as an interdisciplinary and *new* field of research, SoTL immediately adopted the norms of traditional education research, which are drawn from the social sciences, poisoning the well against the development of an inclusive culture (Potter & Wuetherick, 2015).

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that SoTL scholar-practitioners don't perceive the culture's integrity problem. Those excluded by SoTL, on the other hand, are very much aware of the hypocrisy. When people are told they're included at the same moment they're being excluded, the problem is obvious to them.

As a result of the integrity problem, SoTL culture is riven by a deep class division. At minimum there are two classes. The *uberklasse*, which includes social scientists and humanists who have turned themselves into imitation social scientists, is privileged. Its methods, assumptions, values, and other characteristics of scholarly identity are "normal". Members of SoTL's *uberklasse* act as gatekeepers, unconsciously protecting their privilege, status, and power. In contrast, members of the *unterklasse*, which includes humanists, are excluded and oppressed insofar as they resist abandoning their scholarly identities to become imitation social scientists. Members of SoTL's *unterklasse* yearn to be accepted as full members of SoTL culture. Year after year they hang on, submitting papers, presenting at and attending conferences, keeping up with the literature, proselytizing for the very culture that oppresses them. Some even believe they have real representation in SoTL (Chick, 2012).

We call this state of being *engaged alienation*: the experience of those isolated within, and excluded from, a culture to which they have been invited, which tells them they're welcome, in which they therefore have a reasonable expectation of acceptance – and for which they feel a deep sense of attachment, interest, esteem, and investment. In the state of engaged alienation, humanists *qua* humanists are inescapably treated as outsiders while being told they're included.

To fully comprehend the engaged alienation, we must consider the lived experiences of humanists in SoTL culture.

At SoTL conferences and workshops, humanists, by virtue of the types of questions they ask, are treated as deviants, outli-

ers, problematic, and contrary. Faced with negative feedback and exclusion when they try to engage as humanist scholars, even experienced humanists become reluctant to ask questions, lest they lose the morsel of acceptance they might have earned through capitulation. One of us, for example, ceased attending SoTL conferences in 2012 because from a humanist perspective, the conferences weren't scholarly; hostility to meaningful and/or critical engagement made the experience of attending SoTL conferences profoundly aversive. To humanists, scholarly gatherings that discourage questioning and critique lack the elements that would make them scholarly, as suppression hampers understanding and creativity. In the humanities, scholars are encouraged to notice problems and interrogate them, striving to ensure claims earn acceptance by overcoming resistance, striving to ensure that alternative perspectives are considered so we do not find ourselves uncritically propping up whichever perspective or fad holds power at the moment. Mentioning this jarring difference regarding what's accepted as scholarly engagement is unwelcome; humanists learn quickly that SoTL's *uberklasse* has no interest in hearing this "hostile" critique from the *unterklasse*. So, humanists sit through SoTL conferences silently, sometimes offering an always-welcome compliment or tossing out a softball question. In that way, one could say they're still engaged. Yet it's a wan, superficial engagement that violates the scholarly norms of humanist disciplines, norms that have governed their education since their undergraduate years.

When humanists submit to SoTL journals, they learn that many will only publish empirical social science papers, though they claim to be open to other disciplinary methodologies. For example, one of us has many times been told by journal editors – of journals that in their guidelines claim to encourage submissions and methodological approaches from across disciplines – that their paper cannot be sent for review, and does not qualify for publication, as the research does not include empirical data. One such paper explored the evolution of neoliberal ideology and its impact on teaching development – a relevant inquiry that is better pursued through critique and analysis than through demographic data. Thus, humanists who volunteer as reviewers for SoTL journals can go years without being asked to review a single humanist SoTL paper – not necessarily because they aren't being submitted, but because they aren't making it past the editors. In our experience, when a paper does make it out for review, it is likely to be reviewed by social scientists, who suggest running a survey or focus group to improve the paper, not realizing that such methods are irrelevant to a paper using meta-analysis, exegesis, or other humanist research methods. We have also been met with similar results when submitting proposals to national and international SoTL conferences. This level of exclusion is even implicit in the organization and formatting of journal articles. In a scan of the publication guidelines of three well-known SoTL journals, APA (American Psychological Association) is ultimately the only acceptable format – a citation format only used in the social sciences. When humanists serve as SoTL conference chairs or on the editorial boards of SoTL journals, the temptation to give in to the *uberklasse*'s norms and thereby perpetuate its oppression of humanists is sometimes unbearably intense. Resisting a dominant culture is exhausting, demoralizing, and ultimately (many conclude) futile.

Not only are these the lived experiences we and many humanists we know share, they are widespread (see Chick, 2012; Jarvis & Creasey, 2009; McKinney & Chick, 2010; Potter & Wuether-

rick, 2015). Over SoTL's thirty-year history, there have been multiple attempts to bring humanities approaches into the discipline, each time met with rebuke and rejection by SoTL's *uberklasse* (Blau, 2003; Guillory, 2002; Poole, 2012; Potter & Wuetherick, 2015). We and many other humanists have attempted superficial interventions that proved insufficient: attempting to carry out SoTL research using humanist methodologies in spite of everything described above, serving as reviewers for SoTL journals and conferences, joining the editorial boards of SoTL journals, and overseeing SoTL conferences – attempting to initiate more humanists into SoTL. All such efforts have led to failure. Although it seems reasonable to assume that a greater number of humanists performing gatekeeping functions in SoTL could make progress in addressing the integrity problem, it does not. Humanists in such roles are outnumbered and overwhelmed by social scientists, fighting a losing battle against three powerful adversaries: paradigm, discipline, and culture.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ENGAGED ALIENATION

The results of engaged alienation are already widespread and, frankly, predictable. They are the results of living in a state of absurdity, which Vaclav Havel brilliantly captured in so many philosophical and artistic works regarding life in the Eastern Bloc countries under the thumb of the Soviet Union. They are the results experienced by anyone who has endured life in a sustained period of hypocrisy, in which those in power treat you with disdain while claiming to treat you with love. With such widely-studied experiences in mind, and adapting a model developed by Seeman (1959, 1975, 1983), we argue that engaged alienation bleeds into a variety of psychological, emotional, and social consequences – including distrust, burnout, powerlessness, meaninglessness, disinterest/indifference, disengagement/withdrawal, hopelessness, resentment, hostility, rejection, anxiety, and self-estrangement.

The degree of powerlessness a humanist experiences in SoTL is dependent on how conscious they are of their exclusion – so it is likely to appear after they have tried in vain to become accepted in SoTL's culture for several years. The feeling of powerlessness involves awareness of the chasm between what humanists want to accomplish and what they're allowed to accomplish in SoTL. Gradually, humanists realize that their repeated failure to succeed in SoTL stems from forces beyond their control; they are caused by external features of SoTL culture itself, wrapped up in the integrity problem, which systematically disadvantages and disenfranchises them.

Concomitant with the experience of powerlessness is the experience of meaninglessness, as humanists come to understand that there is no way to make choices that will lead to their acceptance, because everything that brought them success in their home disciplines leads to unpredictable consequences in SoTL culture. The expectation of failure, in fact, is the only reasonable prediction they can use to guide their choices. The set of skills, attitudes, values, behaviours, and knowledge humanists developed over the years to achieve success as scholars in their home disciplines is alternately dismissed, ignored, or openly devalued in SoTL culture, which fuels not only the experience of meaninglessness, but may chip away at their confidence in themselves as scholars – and, therefore, their very identities. Combined with the awareness that messaging from SoTL's *uberklasse* cannot be trusted, the

meaninglessness experienced by humanists in a state of engaged alienation can be disorienting.

Such disorientation is likely to lead to hopelessness, anxiety, and depression. If at this point humanists are still engaged, they realize there is a way out of the pit into which they've been led. Many former leaders and "expert practitioners" in SoTL came from the humanities (Chick, 2012; Pace, 2004; Potter & Wuetherick, 2015). Yet they served as tokens; their ideological purpose in SoTL culture was to ward off criticism that humanists were being excluded. Like these disciplinary ancestors, some humanists find acceptance in SoTL through self-estrangement, the denial of their own identities and intrinsic interests through mimicry of the social scientist model SoTL imposes upon them. Over time, they may begin to see themselves as social scientists; SoTL colleagues may see them that way as well. Self-destruction and re-creation in the image of the *uberklasse*, for a humanist, is probably the only path to acceptance in SoTL culture. Though we reject essentialist notions of selfhood, we take it as uncontroversial that, however self-identity is understood, a culture that forces people to contort themselves into identities forced upon them is problematic. The temptation, nonetheless, is powerful. Once humanists have debased themselves into imitation social scientists, they can assimilate. They can feel the light on their skin. They're no longer invisible. They are "no longer excluded because they are no longer functioning as humanists" (Potter & Wuetherick, 2015, p. 5). For most people, the desire to fit in, to feel valued and accepted and included, has extraordinary motivational power.

Yet this process of self-estrangement, self-destruction, and re-creation is not an uncommon choice among people who feel hopelessly trapped in indignity. Let's make no mistake here: we have been describing a state of indignity. SoTL culture does not value humanists as scholars, as experts in their fields, as human ends-in-themselves. Rather, humanists are used by SoTL's *uberklasse* to proselytize, to staff events, to fill roles of little importance.

Those humanists who escape indignity through self-destruction are SoTL's success stories. They are a minority. For most humanists, engaged alienation gives way to mere alienation as distrust and resentment mature into either indifference and withdrawal, or hostility and rejection. We believe, in other words, that most humanists end up either losing interest in SoTL or despising it. These are two common responses to repeated rejection, exclusion, and oppression.

This means that, practically speaking, even if SoTL scholar-practitioners are indifferent to the social, psychological, and moral consequences of the integrity problem, there are consequences they should take seriously, consequences for the scholarly power and value of SoTL as a discipline. It should come as no surprise at this point that humanists are already under-represented in SoTL, and disinclined to participate in SoTL at institutional, national, and international levels (Wuetherick, Yu, & Greer, 2016). With every humanist SoTL drives away, the discipline loses power and reach across the academy. Every humanist who was once enthusiastic about SoTL will share their experiences and judgments with others. Their negative impact on SoTL's acceptance will manifest in multiple forms, large and small: decisions to reject SoTL work when serving on hiring, tenure, and promotion committees; advising graduate students and junior colleagues not to engage in SoTL; declining to use library funds to pay for SoTL books and journals; recommending against participation in SoTL events, and so on. You have probably already witnessed the effects

of SoTL's alienation of humanists without realizing it. The future of SoTL's reach, status, and membership – its socio-political power – depends on whether and how it solves the integrity problem.

Just as practically – and we believe most importantly – SoTL's integrity problem hamstringing the discipline itself, preventing it from ever achieving the *scholarly* power and potential Boyer and others thought it could have. Without the humanities, SoTL lacks the ability to answer (even to meaningfully ask) fundamental non-empirical questions. It holds itself in a superficial state, unable to become a truly scholarly and rigorous research discipline that rests on firm, well-examined premises instead of unreflective assumptions – and thus the ability to honestly, confidently, and reliably apply the results of SoTL research. Without the humanities, SoTL's scholar-practitioners cannot fully understand the research, consequences, and phenomena with which SoTL is concerned.

To understand why SoTL's exclusion of the humanities has hamstrung the discipline, we must articulate precisely what is being excluded. The humanities contain both some of the oldest academic disciplines (the disciplines upon which universities were founded) and some of the newest. They include everything from philosophy, literatures, languages, history, religion and theology, classics, logic, and linguistics to all of the inter- and multi-disciplinary disciplines that have arisen since the 1960s: women's studies, cultural studies, race studies, gender studies, argumentation studies, and many more. What these disciplines share, what unites them as "humanities", is that they "study elements of the human condition and experience (such as culture, languages, values and ideas) using critical, historical, analytical, comparative, or interpretive methods – often, in the process, employing metaphor, narrative, analogy, and other linguistic and imaginative devices" (Potter & Wuetherick, 2015, p. 6). They are diverse, multifaceted, rigorous approaches to scholarship. Even when studying empirical phenomena, the focus on that which is ephemeral about them, complex aspects involved in how people make sense of, and draw meaning from, their lives – concepts, languages, theories, rituals, and the vastly difficult conceptual and practical relationships between members of those categories, asking us often to challenge our biases and assumptions.

The scholarly research methods used in the humanities differ from those used in the social sciences, because their purposes, objects of study, and motivations are different. The social sciences focus on empirical and (purportedly) quantifiable phenomena, asking questions that can be answered through the use of methods appropriate to them (surveys, experiments, field research, interviews, case studies). These methods are not only inappropriate but irrelevant to answering such questions as "What is learning?", "What approaches to learning are valuable?", "What role does reflection play in learning?", "How have conceptions of learning changed across cultures and epochs?", and so forth. To answer such questions, we must use the methods of the humanities, such as close reading (exegesis), conceptual analysis, argument mapping, archival research, methodological doubt, and dialectic (see Chick, 2012, for additional information around humanist methodologies). As Huber and Morreale (2002) note, the humanities "host both the sparsest and the richest conversations about teaching and learning" (p. 9).

Furthermore, all work in the social sciences is dependent on precisely those matters studied by the humanities. As Daniel Dennett (1995) writes, "there is no such thing as philosophy-free science; there is only science whose philosophical baggage is taken

on board without examination” (p. 21). What happens if we strip away from the social science of SoTL every one of its concepts, words, arguments, metaphors, analogies, stories, assumptions, traditions, rituals, contexts, values, histories, theories, and relationships? What remains? Nothing of substance. Nothing with any meaning. In fact, nothing at all, because it is impossible to conduct and communicate research without those elements. Consider the importance of just one of those elements: theory. There are no data without theory, only information. Theory is necessary to distinguish signal from noise, to show us which information may be relevant and salient – that is, which information may be data. And theory is impossible without concepts – and logic to relate those concepts meaningfully. These elements and more are studied in the humanities, using humanistic approaches to research. Notice they’re all present already, in every SoTL book and article. They’re taken as given, without systematic critique, analysis, testing, or interpretation. All of those elements are, in other words, treated in an unscholarly manner that strikes humanists as egregious. We cannot take such things for granted or leave them unexamined, if we’re to place any trust in SoTL’s products. To do so would turn SoTL into an ideology resting on the basest kind of fideistic faith. Yet, that’s precisely how SoTL is being conducted. Take, for example, constructivism – a theory widely used in SoTL literature, which forms the foundation of many important decisions around effective teaching and deep learning. If SoTL literature – whether couched in the social sciences or not – does not consider, explore, and apply constructivist notions critically, readers – and eager teachers – would arrive at unfounded inferences that could in fact harm and not support student learning.

Given SoTL’s reliance on unquestioned and unexamined assumptions, and given its exclusion of the scholars who would question and examine them, it is foolish to treat the results of SoTL research as reliable, as results in which we can have confidence. Their foundation is not only shaky and unstable but also unrecognized as such. To outsiders – both those coming into contact with SoTL for the first time and those marginalized but tolerated within SoTL’s borders – this is often obvious. Skepticism regarding SoTL’s scholarly value is warranted.

As more academics realize that SoTL might be unreliable and untrustworthy as a research discipline, we may reasonably expect its growth to stall, its reputation to become further tarnished, and its long-term future in doubt. As Huber (2002) writes, “If scholarly attention to teaching and learning in higher education is to gain through multi- or interdisciplinary exchange, then a variety of questions need to be asked and a variety of approaches should flourish.... The challenge here is to reconceptualize relationships between the disciplines so that the lessons flow in all directions, rather than demanding the diffusion of one privileged way of knowing” (p. 37). SoTL is now in a precarious position. It needs to address its integrity problem if it is to become a robustly scholarly and trustworthy discipline that will grow in the years to come. The extent and depth of SoTL’s impact and influence, as McKinney (2012) argued, will depend on how well it integrates within and across the disciplines. If she’s correct, the exclusion of humanities has already held SoTL back – and will continue to do so until its inclusive and interdisciplinary promise has been achieved.

A RELATIONSHIP LAID BARE

Consider everything you have read in this paper, right up to the sentence you’re reading now, and ask yourself: what would you think if we were describing a relationship between two individual human beings? How would you judge a relationship in which one party systematically excludes, dominates, and oppresses the other? A relationship in which one party repeatedly tells the other that they’re welcome and wanted, while dismissing, undermining, and marginalizing them at every turn? A relationship in which one party is so desperate to make the relationship work that they’re willing to destroy themselves to meet the other’s demands? You would conclude, no doubt, that the relationship is abusive: the dominant partner is abusing the other.

SoTL is, and has been for more than two decades, in an abusive relationship with humanist scholars. This is not an easy or comfortable statement to make. Arriving at this realization was a long, uncomfortable process for us that involved acknowledging that we have been part of the problem despite being members of the SoTL *unterklasse* ourselves.

Our purpose in this essay is to describe, in stark terms, the reality of SoTL culture as experienced by humanists. This we have done. A description alone necessitates no moral imperatives, no essential calls to action. Yet sometimes a clear-eyed, sober description reveals a situation our consciences recognize as wrong, so we draw a moral imperative from it. An abusive relationship, once recognized, should not remain abusive; it must either change dramatically, or it must end.

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