The Scholar as Human
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Published by Cornell University Press


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In our very first meeting, as we sat around a big table with our sandwiches, we asked ourselves what we wanted to achieve during that year and how we wanted to interrupt and reframe the familiar academic conversations around the humanities, around the role of scholars and scholarship, and around our socialization process and pedagogical practices. How do we have a more human humanities? How do we expose and celebrate the messiness of the human? What is the change we want to see, and how do we contribute to that?

We agreed that while our dialogues were institutionally framed (we were up on the hill, after all, sitting in what was formerly the house of Cornell’s cofounder and first president), we all felt strongly that it was important for us to get off campus—with our website, with this book, and with public events that truly welcomed the wider community. Yet . . .

While all of us were “community-minded,” to use Ella Diaz’s term, and are committed to “humanities in action” (Christine Henseler), not everyone was directly involved in concrete collaborations with off-campus community members, and some of us found it challenging to imagine spaces of true collaboration. For those of us who were involved in such collaborations, in the midst of the rich exchanges that were the highlight of our Wednesdays there was a slightly melancholic note. The very structures that made these conversations possible also prevented us from including our community partners
in these dialogues except indirectly. (For example: the funding that brought us together was limited to Cornell faculty and graduate students, and our community leaders couldn’t get off work to come to campus for regular midday meetings.)

This section explores three different ways that some of us who are deeply invested in community collaboration have thought about the interdisciplinary intersections and challenges of our work, how what we bring from our academic background is enriched by what we learn from our partners, and how we try to understand the formal structures, constraints, and opportunities. Above all, we want to convey the joy of humanities work, the love for the things we make and the things we do.