

Who Counts.

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Say you have something meaningful to share with the profession,
and you'd like your work to help secure a position with your first institution or perhaps earn promotion.
Here's a series of steps, more formula than dance, that if followed will lead you.

First, tie your hands with the marionette strings attached to accepted ideas.
Next build a wall. A theoretical framework like bricks and mortar that can
strengthen your position by limiting your vision while making yourself look smart.
From here, pick one of two flavors, or use half of each,
but be sure it all tastes the same when poured into a one-size-fits-all mold.
Collect numbers or words and arrange as you prefer to build weapons for attack and defense.
"Teachers' beliefs were a 2.4." "There were three emergent themes, because there was no room for more."
Force it all back through the impenetrable word press and manufacture implications for practice.
Suggest that others join the dance with acceptable variations then tie it up with a bow and check the page count.
Remove adjectives as needed.

Finally, submit your sweat and your tears for approval to a jury, not of your peers but of superiors
who will tell you "Cite *this* work, cite *that* study, cite *my* book. Membership to this club is exclusive.
I've paid my dues, and to do likewise you'll do the same."

Once you've acquiesced and played by the rules you've bought a brand new line paid for in full.
Buying in, or selling out? Is there a difference?

Your next move is on a plane to some city somewhere to sit in a small room
and point with power at chess pieces that are almost entirely white.
You recite what they've told you are the right ways to think, and they'll clap.
Then one deaf bishop will preach by asking what isn't actually a question.

The lesser alternative for disseminating your work would be
to condense your already reduced perspective of the world onto a few feet of posterboard.
Then stand in front of this abbreviation of thought using your body as a shield against the arrows of,
"Why is your N so small? This should've been a survey," and, "It's not really about music, is it?"

And everyone will order the usual at a different restaurant
then go home the same, unchanged by unchallenging questions. But the food, like the fellowship was good.

And if you'd like to secure employment and advance your career, those are your options, my friend.
There's security in the formula with one dash of self-protection and one heaping helping of power preservation.
It's a recipe in a cookbook written by those with the most to lose.
A paint-by-number pony show set to the carnival anthem on a carousel turning around and around and around.

But what if I could tell a more meaningful truth through fiction?
Would it count? Who would listen?
What if my experiences and those of the storytellers can't be translated into Times New Roman?
What if twenty pages only begin to explain, and what if the nature of pages themselves
only builds a boundary protecting scholarship from new ideas?
What happens when someone has taught you a lesson and every other word out of his mouth was "motherfucker?"
Do we listen? Or do we laugh because we're uncomfortable when we hear a long-silenced voice break through?
Listen up, motherfuckers. Listen up.

This isn't about the limits on pages and words or the battle between numbers and letters.
Lost in those polarizing paralyzing weeds are the restrictions of acceptable thought
compelled by what counts and what matters.

What if counting was not resigned to the abacus, but counting included all of us
navigating experience, negotiating meaning, exploring understanding, and complicating reason?
Instead we embrace a willing reduction of the complex whole into palatable, digestible, bite-sized work
and wash it down with, "it is what it is."

Of course we can't understand the whole world in one glance,
but does that mean that our initial position should be to limit our grasp to what we can fit in our hands?
We cling to the acceptable, rush to define; build models on tables that disable our minds,
all in the hopes of explaining away the beautiful confounding complex inextricable perplexing pluralistic naturalistic
unexplainable nature of our world.

Are we so saturated by beakers and test tubes and narratives that pour easily into beakers and test tubes
that there is no room for *art* in fine arts scholarship?
Should I apologize for this format and say our scholarship is fine, or can I *speak* and be heard?
Does my voice count?

Our body of research is wrapped tight like a mummy preserving historical beliefs.
The mind excavated through the nose with a hook promoting obedient relief.
Eyes closed to the questions that matter for people, blinded to what's going on.
Lips buttoned tight by one-inch margins, after all that's where the marginalized belong.
Hands tied, feet bound, constricted by tradition.
Not a noun from the past, but a verb in the present perpetuating, discriminating, dominating and limiting.
Ears and hearts slammed shut by the handful of headings that outline and define what – no *who* matters.
Who counts.

And who counts?
I do.
She does.
He does.
We do.

What if we lifted anchors and set sail in new directions?
What if we changed the rules, not to lower standards, but to nurture possibility?
And what if we built an arena that questioned traditional notions of scholarship expanding the idea of what counts?

And what counts?
Who counts.