

Who Counts.

Adam J. Kruse

Companion Statement

I have gone back and forth with others and myself for some time over whether or not the spoken word piece for the *New Directions Journal* ought to have a written companion statement. On one hand, it is not my intention to apologize for or retract the positions I took as author and narrator of the piece. On the other hand, this medium may not be familiar for everyone in this audience, and considering the possibly provocative nature of the content an explanatory statement could aid in encouraging a productive dialogue. While I appreciate that such a statement was not a prerequisite for publication, my primary concerns for the piece include clarity and the prospect of inspiring a meaningful conversation. Therefore, I offer this brief companion statement to the spoken word piece, *Who Counts*.

I consider *Who Counts* a piece of word-based performance art similar to the “slam poetry” subgenre of spoken word art. Spoken word art has arguably existed for centuries, but most current iterations (particularly slam poetry and other predominantly urban and hip-hop artistic spoken word practices) stem from traditions traced to the Harlem Renaissance. I chose this medium not only for its engaging and decisively provocative nature, but also as a demonstration of the portrayed message. By using spoken word to deliver this particular material, I hoped to challenge dominant (and dominating) practices while providing evidence of the possibilities that unorthodox formats might offer. In this way, the medium and the message in this piece are intended to have a reflexive and reciprocal relationship. In other words, I intended for the presentational style of this piece to support my arguments.

In order to situate *Who Counts* and facilitate a productive discussion, it is with great humility that I offer two pieces of visual art and a written work for brief consideration. First is Duchamp's iconic *Fountain*. *Fountain* consisted of a porcelain men's urinal signed with the dubious signature, "R. Mutt," which was presented at an exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917. The controversial and hotly debated piece challenged traditional notions of what counts as art by confronting perceptions of the work's aesthetic values (Smith, 2012). While I make no claims that *Who Counts* and *Fountain* exist in the same artistic arena, I simply present *Fountain* as precedent for using an irregular presentational approach to challenge the status quo.

Additionally, consider Bokor's entry into the 2013 ArtPrize contest, titled *Erase*. In this piece, Bokor presented a hyperrealist 20-foot long pencil drawing of an AR-15 assault rifle accompanied by a pile of pink erasers. Each eraser was printed with the name of a victim killed in recent American mass shootings, and those viewing the piece were invited to use the erasers to erase a portion of the assault rifle drawing until nothing remained. Bokor's powerful statement was made not solely by his drawing, but by the interaction between his contribution and his audience. His submitted drawing was not a finished product, but rather an impetus for dialogue and action. I cannot claim that *Who Counts* tackles a topic nearly as important as *Erase*, but I do embrace the notion that my submission is a beginning rather than an end and will ideally serve as a stimulus for conversation and change.

Finally, Lorde's (1984) assertion that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 110) suggests that confronting convention requires unconventional tactics. In this way, I hope that *Who Counts* positively provokes notions of what counts as music education scholarship regardless of whether all audience members find the piece intellectually or aesthetically pleasing.

I certainly recognize some of the positive value of our traditions and have myself engaged meaningfully in our writing, researching, and publishing enterprises. *Who Counts* presents my humble message not as an airtight or philosophically sound argument, but rather as a limited and flawed individual perspective shared with all of the emotion and contempt that might accompany graduate study and professional academic pursuits. I do not perceive these limitations as weaknesses, but rather as strengths. One could argue that every author presents a similarly limited perspective and to pretend otherwise is tantamount to dishonesty. Whether this piece is perceived as meaningful scholarship or merely adolescent howling at the moon, my hope is that at least this work is seen as honest and that it might serve as a catalyst to a productive conversation about the beliefs, values, and practices related to scholarship in our field.

References

Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.

Smith, L. (2012). After aesthetics: Art and open dialogue. *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, 9(1).