
TDR Comment

I Would Have Liked to Give a Paper at this Conference

Jessica Chalmers

Ed. note: The following was read at the Performance Studies Conference, held in New York City in April 2002.

I would have liked to give a paper at this conference
To have been invited
To address people
And not in a poem
To present an idea
Of which I have many
And get some reactions
From people who might also help me
Find my way in the field
Or who might help me publish
Because I'm up for renewal
And have a manuscript
Which is *almost* not my dissertation.

I would have liked to give a paper at this conference
And put it on my CV
That I came to this conference
The major conference in my field
Which is performance studies
Which is a pretty weird field
At least in Indiana
Where I try to explain it to people
People who give papers at conferences
And where I'm up for renewal next year
In a department of theatre
And where I have a lot of big ideas
While I'm walking to the parking lot—
But I haven't published too much
Yet.

I didn't really want to give a poem
But I'll put it on my CV anyway

Maybe with another title
Because I need to be active
I need to seem active
In the field of performance studies
Which no one has heard of
Not even the provost
Or the others
For whom the sum performance studies plus performance artist plus femininity
Apparently equals *Fun*.
And according to whose vision of the University
As a smorgasbord of disciplines
Fun is hopefully tenurable.

So I am giving this poem
In order to appear to be active
And also to get reimbursed
From my university
Which rewards the rewarded
With trips
And which smiles on the disciplines
(No matter how *fun*)
That have normal things
Like conferences
Which are places for debate
But are also places for juniors to perform
Their active participation
In a discipline
Even a discipline like performance studies
Where to be junior
Minor
Pipsqueak
Suppliant
As in any other discipline
Is to have to ask favors
From those with no time.

So I am giving this poem
In the form of a short complaint
And as a reminder of the plight of the junior who
Like any other junior
In any other business
Is in thrall to a process of professionalization
A total corporate process
Whose existence she never imagined
While reading theories of subversion
As a graduate student.

But I am also giving this reminder
In the form of a poem
Because this is in fact the kind of thing
I imagined I'd be doing
While reading theories of subversion
As a graduate student who
Like any other graduate student

Apprentice
Intern
Consumer
Supplicant
Is in thrall to a familial vision of the university
And to the idea of a discipline that
Unlike every other discipline
Might accept a little poem
As a professional contribution
A meditation on belonging to
Admission to
The performance studies field.

Jessica Chalmers is currently Assistant Professor of Performance Studies at the University of Notre Dame. She is working on a book, Reality Theater, about her education in theory, her work's relationship to the 1960s, and her identity as a performing academic and academic performer.