
A Jester's Guide to Creative See[k]ing across Disciplines



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For many centuries and in many cultures, jesters recited tales of heroic exploits, but they did more than simply recount past events—they amused, cajoled, and spun tales that transported listeners to the edge of mysterious, unmapped territories. Through the transformative power of play and the imagination, they reworked what was already understood and created from it new realities that transcended the established order. The author maintains that such imaginative play is vital to creativity in any medium and is fundamental for optimal human development. She explores possibilities for cultivating creativity through the playful, paradoxical stance of the jester—a serendipitous and purposeful, strange and familiar, disruptive and productive figure. Her discussion, grounded in a visual-arts practice that leverages uncertainty and randomness, considers the role of play in light of its wider implications for knowledge and creativity. **Keywords:** creativity; imagination; jester; play and creativity

Prologue

I BEGAN THIS INQUIRY because I was curious about the jester as a ludic character—as a jokester and as an entertaining narrator of adventure tales. The word jester, after all, comes from the Old French *geste*—a narrative of exploits, action, and romance—and from the Latin for deeds and achievements, *gesta*. What I discovered is that the jester not only portrays an icon of play and subversive humor but of powerful, creative imagination as well. More than mere clowns or storytellers, these complex, multidimensional figures were profoundly clever, provocative, and—according to King Lear—“oft prophetic” game changers. The jester persona has played an essential role as an agent for change throughout history and across cultures. Just as his acerbic humor spurred political change within the court, the jester’s masterful sense of play is a central force of creative change in the larger world. His antics and waggish retorts are more than amusing; they can be revelatory. By drawing listeners into an uncanny traveler’s space that no

longer involves departure and does not yet include arrival, putting everything at a distance from recognizable places, jesters disoriented, dislocated, and transported kings and commoners alike to the boundaries of the familiar. Where these neatly marked borders dissolve, we discover the roots of our own creativity in the serendipities of disorder, uncertainty, and accident. For this exploration of the creative process, let us imagine a similar paradoxical space with the jester serving as metaphorical guide to things both familiar and strange, things both controlled and playfully improvisatory, things both fixed and uncertain, and things both destructive and brimming with possibilities for constructing new realities.

Political Jester: The Subversive Outsider

The jester and other lords of mischief are ubiquitous in legends and lore around the world. The personification of a provocateur—Latin *provocare*, meaning challenge, from *pro* (forth) plus *vocare* (to call)—they stand at or wholly outside the margin of any organized system while challenging those within to see things differently. In European traditions, their earliest antecedents were probably the comic actors of ancient Rome. Frequently in trouble with imperial magistrates or church officials who disapproved of their outspokenness, many jesters took to the road in search of greater freedom. Successive waves of such wandering comics may have laid the foundations for medieval jesterdom.¹

By the Middle Ages, the jester had become a familiar figure as a comic entertainer whose madness or imbecility, real or feigned, made him a source of amusement. Much as depicted even today, the jester wore multicolored garb and a quirky three-pointed hood representing the ears and tail of an ass. This droll outward appearance, however, belied a careful and penetrating wit. Where freedom of speech was not considered a universal right, the seemingly nonsensical utterances of a “fool” might easily be dismissed, enabling jesters to speak frankly on controversial issues in a way those with greater status—and more to lose—did not dare. Note that “jester” and “fool” are synonymous and can be used interchangeably. Although I primarily use jester in this article, I retain the word fool where it appears in quotes and for specific references such as the Fool card in a tarot deck.

During the Renaissance, jesters enjoyed official status as entertainers, advisers, and critics; most royal courts and aristocratic households employed licensed jesters. Historian Jacques Barzun notes that the institution of the king's fool

was “a political device based on sound psychology, as well as ancient religious belief. The traditional fool . . . is like a child, innocent, therefore truthful and sometimes inspired. His sallies are unexpected and amusing. This makeup, native or assumed, is essential to the profession that the fool exercised for centuries at the side of kings.”² Whereas a natural fool implied being innately dimwitted or mad, licensed fools had the court’s permission to speak freely, even to abuse or ridicule the most exalted of their patrons. Thus, both were excused for their behavior, the first because he couldn’t help it and the second by decree.

Court jesters functioned, in this sense, as traditional political humorists. With no vested interest in any region, estate, or church, they existed outside the hierarchal court system, which meant their counsel was more likely unbiased and trustworthy. It was their job to keep the king grounded by mocking his political decisions and life at court in general, not unlike today’s political satirists do for those in positions of power.

Symbolic Jester: Play and Creative Power

Little is known about the exact origins of tarot imagery, but precedents appear in symbols from sources as diverse as folklore, mythology, ancient religious traditions, and the medieval courts of Italy and France, where tarot first became popular for gaming in the mid-fifteenth century.³ Portraying archetypes of the collective unconscious, tarot cards had long been used for spiritual purposes to deepen insight and divine the future, but the rich symbology of these images enhances even their entirely secular use in games. Having four suits like conventional playing cards, the tarot deck adds a twenty-one-card trump suit plus a card known as the Fool. Just as the natural or licensed fool was excused from the consequences of his shenanigans, playing this card can excuse a player from either following suit or playing a trump card on any given trick. The Fool card is, in fact, sometimes called the Excuse. As such, most tarot decks originally made for game playing do not assign a number to this card. There are two exceptions: sometimes the Fool represents zero (before the first) or twenty-two (the last) trump card. Because his unique role in the game is independent of both suit cards and trump cards, the Fool stands completely apart, belonging to neither category and having no number in a set sequence.

Poised between positive and negative, resting in the exact middle of the number system, zero perfectly signifies the fool. He can become anything in the

sense of the “joker is wild,” which may be a remnant of the jester’s actual lack of a fixed position at court. Like the air or wind of his etymology—Latin *folliis* means “bellows, bag of wind”—the fool moves around constantly and belongs to no single place. The words “fool” and “foolish,” therefore, also imply that which contains air or breath, i.e. life energy itself. Thus, in various traditions, the fool stands for primal concepts that include absolute being, eternity, the essential self, Tao, Prana, the beginning of new life cycles, and the originating creative power.

Fool's Journey as Creative Process

Like all true symbols, tarot images generate an abundance of meanings, many of which have compelling resonance for creativity. One in particular, the fool’s journey, is an apt metaphor for the creative process itself. Symbolizing new beginnings as well as the playing out of what was begun, the fool’s journey may encompass mental, physical, or spiritual dimensions, but it is always marked by wonder. It corresponds to any creative path undertaken with childlike innocence, exuberance, and playful spontaneity.

Open to the unexpected, travelers in this guise wander freely beyond known coordinates, overturn the status quo, and build new knowledge by means other than reason. Galvanized by curiosity amidst the uncertainties of being on the road, jesters—like their close kin, tricksters “are the lords of in-between . . . the spirit of the doorway leading out, and of the crossroad at the edge of town. . . . In short, trickster is a boundary-crosser. We constantly distinguish right and wrong, sacred and profane, male and female, young and old, living and dead—and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. Trickster is the creative idiot, the wise fool . . . the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox.”⁴

Adapting this notion of a “spirit of the doorway”—doubling and redoubling as entrance and exit, past and future—creativity theorist and clinical professor of psychiatry Albert Rothenberg coined the term *Janusian process* to describe creative cognition, defined as actively conceiving opposites or antitheses as if simultaneously coexisting and named for Janus, the ancient Roman god of portals, doorways, and passageways who was a patron of beginnings and endings and whose two faces look simultaneously forward and backward.

Based on his extensive research in the creative process of prominent artists and scientists, Rothenberg found the Janusian process supplies the foundation of creative thinking across domains, where seemingly illogical and contradictory formulations serve generative functions for art and for working out solutions to

scientific and practical tasks.⁵ The Janusian process, in other words, transcends logic by *playing* with known elements in unexpected ways, triggering unforeseen leaps to qualitatively new ideas and conceptual formulations. Einstein's concept of being in motion and at rest at the same time represents a classic Janusian leap. "Fooling around with" these opposites and imagining them in a simultaneous paradoxical pairing, he created a meaningful formulation connecting gravitation and special relativity.

On a practical level, then, dialectical mechanisms expand our perspective and leverage creative thinking. Bringing together contradictory entities to express a problem embodies an inherently jester-like strategy, one that relies on a spirit of open-ended play to conjure new meaning out of apparent chaos. It provides a highly effective means of initiating and facilitating creative tasks. "Conflict," as John Dewey reminds us, "is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates invention, shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us noting and contriving."⁶ Any creative journey is full of such contradiction, paradox, and uncertainty, fueled by reciprocal interactions of stability and instability, randomness and increasing levels of organization. Along the way, and with play at its core, this vibrant creative process enlivens our world and gives us the flexibility to evolve and flourish.

Multiple Possibilities

Depicted on tarot cards as either juggling, looking up at the heavens while a small dog barks at his heels (the popular Rider-Waite deck image), or otherwise distracted, the Fool is seemingly unconcerned that he is about to step off the edge of a high cliff. This paradigm of the zero (that is, of the Fool having no predetermined place within the card sequence), of the precipice, and of the oblivious Fool's near step into the void are all mutually informing polysemy within tarot iconography. This is the jester's perpetual mode. By definition, open-ended activities—such as engaging in creative tasks or playing games—present us with nearly infinite choices. And just as contradictory opposites hold more information than either element alone, the jester's ambiguous stance holds more potential than any single option. Like the versatile, multifaceted, and wily jester himself, the word "play" is highly polysemous: he plays around, plays with fire, plays in or performs a play or *geste*, plays it by ear, plays the fool, plays tricks, plays favorites, plays up to, plays on words and the credulity of others, and plays out stale ideas and puts new ones into play as he plays at deconstructing and reconstructing his world.

The legendary 1929 film *Un Chien Andalou* (*The Andalusian Dog*) suggests an ingenious example of this kind of play. The film was intended to mock the philosophical and moral inertia that typified the convention-bound bourgeoisie of the early twentieth century. Playing on the polysemous quality of the word “open,” film makers Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali open with a shocking visual assault—close-ups of a young woman’s face as a razor slices across her eyeball. In this literally and figuratively “eye-opening” sequence, the images immediately challenge us to cut through our own jaded expectations and open up to seeing with fresh eyes. The absence of any overt causal connections in the film further undermines the viewer’s usual reliance on narrative or theme for meaning. The film is deliberately plotless, and its chronologically disjointed images subvert narrative logic and flow randomly as if in a dream. Playing irreverently with content and technique, *Chien Andalou* remains open to infinite interpretations. This flexibility both illustrates and elicits from us a similar kind of surreal perspective, an essentially creative modality in which we become unmoored, unstuck from the rational, the habitual, and the routine, and it enables us to see a multitude of new angles and options from which to create our world anew.

Risk Taking

Although the jester embodies the destructive phase of creative imagination, undoing hierarchies and upsetting established patterns, he also contains its opposite, forging links that enable the construction of new patterns and structures. In addition to encompassing innocence, heterodoxy, and freedom, his energy represents the confidence and audacity needed for taking risks. Not one to play it safe, he willingly steps off the precipice; he dares take action where circumstances and outcomes are unclear. And by disrupting meanings that are—or had been—familiar, comfortable, and safe, he provokes others to risk seeing what they might otherwise not see. His is the path of creativity and radical play, continually disturbing boundaries between what is and what is not.

Emergent Meaning

The jester, having no fixed position (zero) and no preexisting meaning, also exemplifies the transformative quality of dynamic processes. In himself, he is not any one thing but is potentially all things, shaped by and shaping meaning as subject in relation to situations and to other actors or players. Never single, static, or complete, he is ever changing and always plural. Creativity, like all complex dynamic systems, is a function of such transfor-

mation through emergence, i.e. the process by which global-level structures or patterns (weather systems for example) arise from interactive, local-level processes that include random and unforeseeable factors. Creativity cannot be analyzed rationally nor predicted from the behavior or properties of its component elements alone. It arises instead, as a result of multiple reciprocal interactions of individuals, environments, and the passage of time. The jester's creative narrative, though, is never linear. He weaves his tale playfully, in alternative and nonlinear ways, as a discontinuous travelogue through fields both real and imagined, never lingering in static frames or hierarchies and assuming only the infinite pleasure of continuing the process.

Thresholds and Ambiguity

Traveling through but not a part of any narrative context, the jester is the beginning and the end, nothing and everything, nowhere and everywhere, betwixt and between—in a word, liminal. The concept of *liminality*, a conscious or unconscious subjective state of being on the threshold of—or between—two different existential planes, was initially developed to analyze the middle stage or “interstructural period” in ritual passages, and has since been applied more broadly to studying cultures of change.⁷ Necessarily ambiguous, the attributes of liminality involve dissolution of order and formative reintegration of new structures. The jester, a perpetual wanderer, is quintessentially liminal. Residing nowhere in particular, he is neither circumscribed nor informed by the norms of any given context or fixed setting. He is “on the road,” a character apart and in between and not, therefore, prescriptively oriented. Like double-faced Janus, the jester has no single direction or identity—but he has the potential for many.

Embraced rather than avoided, this kind of ambiguity offers an interdisciplinary paradigm for creative imaginative play—a positive, liminal mode of opportunity, in which multiple new possibilities may be set in motion by wandering amid the turmoil of upended rules and the attendant confusion of dislocated meanings and uncertainty about future outcomes. Creating anything new necessarily shifts things to unknown ground, putting us off balance. Seeking new balance within the disequilibrium compels us to shuffle the deck, to redefine terms, expectations, and routines. Analogous to chaos theory's far-from-equilibrium systems, the creative process denotes a kind of evolving system that carries the energizing potential related to new development at the borders of change in our world.⁸ These dynamic transitional states actually enable innovation and the emergence of new work, losing stability when subjected to nonlinear, turbulent

conditions, then evolving into one of many available new states. Thus, as the jester implicitly understands, our actual and created worlds depend equally on factors at once purely deterministic and entirely random.

A central paradox of creativity here comes into sharp focus: the seeming contradiction of having a clear purpose while uncertainty and disorder play a defining role in the unfolding result. This dialectic relationship between chance and intentionality is a fundamental characteristic of the creative process. Skirting the edge and playing at the boundary of any domain confuses, disrupts, and ultimately collapses old dichotomies, replacing them with a realm of unsettled opposites. Fueled by its very indeterminacy, the creative journey ends where it began, with everything the same and yet different. New patterns and unforeseen combinations are engendered, not as mere oppositional inversions (where, say, what is true becomes false) but as inventively reintegrated reformulations with altered—and most likely porous—boundaries.

Evolutionary Jester: Ancestral Roots of Play

One instance of an increasingly porous conceptual border exists in the old Cartesian divide between mind and body. Neuroscientist and psychologist Jaak Panksepp maintains that—based on studies of evolutionary links between reason and affect—a true understanding of mind and ground of being requires “neuroscientific probing of those ancestral value-processes that evolution provided to help complex creatures like mammals navigate successfully through the world,” with knowledge of “lower” affective functions interacting with and shedding light on the operation of higher brain-mind functions.⁹ Panksepp names seven primal action networks that may have served to inform our ancestors what is worth thinking about. Among them are SEEKING and PLAY, which Panksepp upper cases in his writings.

Evidence indicates that all mammalian brains contain a general-purpose SEEKING/ EXPECTANCY system that mediates a coherent urge to explore the environment, a pattern of behaviors arising from positive emotions within the SEEKING urge such as wanting, expectancy, curiosity, and interest. Specifically, this neuro-affective system appears to help generate a psychological state close to a “generalized, positive engagement with the world at large . . . an invigorated feeling of engagement with tasks that can border on euphoria.”¹⁰ In his theory of flow, the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes a similar pattern

of intrinsic interest, positive involvement, and energized, riveted attention to tasks—a state of deep concentration in which intentions, thoughts, emotions, and senses focus on a single goal.

This feeling of flow is most often described as accompanying immersion in activities that involve novelty, search, and discovery but may pertain to any task in which one is keenly interested. Undeniably, the more we care about something, the greater our interest in it, the more authentic, pleasurable, and effective our involvement becomes. Contrary to the belief that such positive emotions merely signal well-being, current theory supports the idea that they also produce health and well-being, and that these increases in personal resources are durable over time. Barbara Fredrickson, a leading scholar in social psychology and affective science, has found “interest” to be a “distinct positive emotion that creates the urge to explore, take in new information and experiences, and expand the self in the process,” contributing to our becoming more creative, resilient, socially integrated, and healthy.¹¹

The same appears to be true of PLAY. Demonstrating a profound desire to interact with each other in energetic, gleeful ways, the young of most animal species play to experiment with and navigate social possibilities. Neuroscience provides substantial clues to understanding what enjoyment consists of and how it is produced in play and creativity. Studies indicate that evolutionary cognitive-emotive circuits of “affective consciousness” produce positive emotions like interest, curiosity, and the urge to explore and play and that these emotions are crucial elements of optimal functioning. We should cultivate them, therefore, not just because they make us feel good in the moment, “but also because doing so transforms people for the better and sets them on paths toward flourishing.”¹² As well as providing us with enjoyment and diversion, the process of exploring our world through play appears to be truly essential to human development.

Along similar lines, an intriguing study in evolutionary psychology proposes that neophilia—a preference for the novel and unexpected—played a significant role in the evolution of the human brain and, more specifically, in the development of creative intelligence. Hominid neophilia in mate choice, this theory suggests, favored mental capacities for generating various “protean” (that is, adaptively unpredictable) courtship displays in the domains of language, music, art, humor, sexual play, and conceptual play, thereby driving psychological complexity and the capacity for domain-general creative thought.¹³ If such protean ancestral behaviors underlie the evolution of our mind-brain, the innate tendency to play may be truly instrumental to the advancement of

human creativity, moving us to ask what-if, to look again at what is, and to imagine what could be.

The jester is a paragon of such complexity and creativity. Relentlessly inventive, resilient, and resourceful, he entertains but also puzzles and provokes his audience. Through subversive play, he rouses them from inertia. A mercurial and unpredictable force, the jester represents the primal energy that propels us both inward and outward toward personal and cultural progress, from felt contradiction, to passion, to creative action in the world.

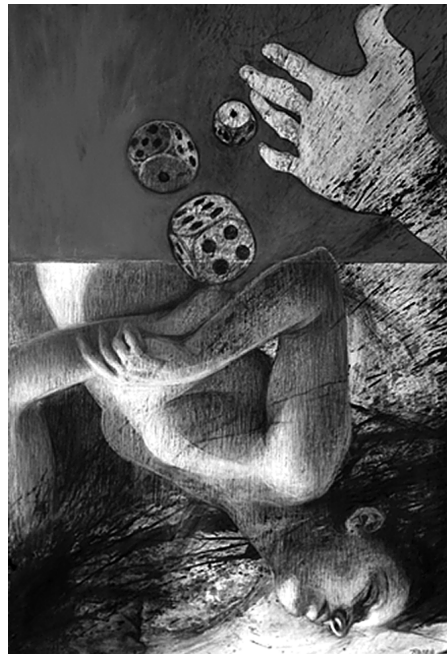
Jester-Guide: The Role of Play in Creative Process

Hard wired into our cognitive-emotive circuitry, then, interest and curiosity spark the urge to approach and explore, and to search for everything from essentials like food and shelter to better sorts of food and shelter, to more abstract desires that motivate the creation of theories, paintings, and songs. Ultimately, these experiments and explorations are shaped by reciprocal interaction with chance occurrences. Consider Igor Stravinsky's description of the creative process in his *Poetics of Music*: "One does not contrive an accident: one observes it to draw inspiration therefrom. An accident is perhaps the only thing that really inspires us. A composer improvises aimlessly the way an animal grubs about. Both of them go grubbing about because they yield to a compulsion to seek things out. . . . So we grub about in expectation of our pleasure, guided by our scent, and suddenly we stumble against an unknown obstacle. It gives us a jolt, a shock, and this shock fecundates our creative power."¹⁴ Granted, some measure of domain knowledge and skill is necessary for most forms of creativity, from everyday to eminent, but it is not in itself sufficient. What "shocks" us out of passivity and sets us to observing and contriving is discordance, a rift between the expected and the unpredictable that is the jester's sovereign realm. Truly essential, then, is a shift in perspective from linear and controlled to flexible, from logical to paradoxical, and from predictable to open ended. Balancing in the tension of zero—playing with, from, and in its immanent uncertainty—brings with it the freedom to exist nowhere and everywhere, in nothing and everything, follow the path yet stray unexpectedly from the given route. Yielding to a compulsion to seek things out, the jester, too, improvises aimlessly. It is his way to have no way and therefore access to all ways.

In my experience as a painter, I have learned to trust that this creative-generative process is both intentional and uncertain, that a creative "product"

comes to exist not as an end in itself but as the erratic trajectory through time of a particular search for answers to half-formed questions. Stirred by curiosity and the anticipation of discovery, I tend to begin with a word or phrase that interests me. Then, playing with a random assortment of images, I arrange and rearrange them until one combination resonates and surprises me with unforeseen meaning. Three of my mixed-media paintings may serve to illustrate this knowing by not-knowing process of playful wondering, wandering, and exploring—of leaving rules and reason behind.

Throw of the Dice is a reference to Stéphane Mallarmé's free-verse poem "Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" ("A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance"). The poem's unorthodox form and content embody what I sought to express graphically: thought, given its freedom of expression, converts chance into creative power. The word "chance" itself has a highly descriptive etymology: from the Old French *cheance*, meaning accident, luck, or the falling of dice; and Vulgate Latin *cadentia*, meaning that which falls out, which itself



Throw of the Dice by Diane Rosen. Photo courtesy of the author.



Undertow by Diane Rosen. Photo courtesy of the author.

comes from Latin *cadens*, a participle of *cadere* meaning to fall and leads to our own cadence, meaning the flow of rhythm in verse or music. Inspired by these vivid linguistic roots, and after much experimenting and reworking, I happened upon the idea of merging falling (upside down) figures with falling dice. Only by maintaining the sense of play in this process—like continual throws of the dice and responses to their unforeseeable results—can we engender the kind of random, fortuitous connections that defy reason alone.

The idea for *Undertow* began as I wondered about various ways to represent pairs of contrasting figures. I was working on a series of paintings intended to graphically question traditional dichotomies such as true-false, internal-external, fixed-uncertain, challenging their rigidity with more contingent interpretations. Curious about reflections and doubles as they occur in nature not just in mirrors, I happened upon the word “undertow,” a current below the surface of the sea moving in the direction opposite of the surface current, and figuratively an implicit quality, emotion, or influence underlying the superficial aspects of something. From this definition arose thoughts of contrasting reality-reflection, above-below, exterior-interior and so on. An alternative dual image emerged that is meant to evoke for viewers the questions that originally surprised and interested me.

From the same series exploring the use of paired images to amplify meaning, *The Sound of One Hand* is based on two primary sources: Edgar Degas's 1878



The Sound of One Hand by Diane Rosen.
Photo courtesy of the author.

painting *Café Concert Singer* (in the collection of the Fogg Museum at Harvard University) and a famous *koan* or teaching riddle. Written by the eighteenth-century Zen master Hakuin, the koan, “What is the sound of one hand?” was intended to demonstrate the inadequacies of logical reasoning and to provoke enlightenment. As explained by Hakuin, “the sound of a single hand can by no means be heard with the ear. Quite apart from seeing, hearing, perceiving and knowing...it is in the place where reason is exhausted and words are ended” that insight is attained.¹⁵ In the random interplay of these ideas and images beyond the reach of reason, I am better able to “hear” what I want to see/say/paint. Wandering this open-ended, ambiguous terrain triggers uncertainty, which can be leveraged to spur new ideas. Any playful thought or gesture may turn out to matter in ways that could not have been foreseen. Thus, incorporating spattered, dripped, and scraped paint along with deliberately rendered figures, I engage with and signal the paradoxically reciprocal role of chance and intentionality in the work. Such paradox is central to my own—and, I believe, to any—creative process.

Where Reason Is Exhausted

“The difficult thing was not making things, but putting oneself in conditions in which one could make them.”¹⁶ Thinking about these conditions vaguely referenced by sculptor Constantin Brancusi, one might assume the jester’s point of

view and attempt to foster a similar threshold state—positioned at zero, neither plus nor minus, the imagination free to wander in any direction. The following exercises suggest ways of cultivating this felicitous in-between state, with play as the mediating factor between control and the freedom of authentic creativity. The point of these practices is that there is no point; constraints of rational, analytical thought are banished, leaving only random play to disrupt routine ways of seeing and reward us with fresh perspectives from which to respond.

The exquisite corpse. This collaborative game of blind composition exploits the mysterious potency of accident. A piece of paper is folded to conceal all but one word, or section of an image, and passed among a group of players. Each player adds a phrase or image, folds to conceal all but a small part of it, and passes the paper to the next player for his or her contribution. (See page 324 for an example of the exquisite corpse game.) Reflection: How does this game illustrate the role of accident and intuition in creative work?

Exquisite corpse variant. Doodle for thirty seconds; pass the paper to the person on your right, who—with the instruction to “improve” what is there—adds to the drawing. Repeat the process until the doodle returns to the first person. Next, follow the same process, except instruct players to add something intended to spoil the doodle. Reflection: Are spoiled pieces worse, better, or equally interesting?

Frottage. Graphite rubbings of floorboards, tree bark, screens, walls, or other surface textures serve as a starting point for releasing the imagination. Add words or drawn elements suggested by the random frottage patterns. Reflection: How did the unanticipated frottage patterns factor into your process?

“Blind” contour drawing. Place pencil on paper, close your eyes, and draw a self-portrait. Following only your intuitive sense of form, move the pencil over paper imagining that it is your fingertip touching every contour of your face. Surprisingly to some, intuitive, sensitive self-depictions are usually produced. Reflection: Is inner or outer self emphasized? Distortions can be even more interesting and revealing than precise renderings.

Creativity cannot be contained in a hierarchy or even in a simple division of genres. What often constitutes the status of anything as “creative” is precisely its subversive force with respect to old classifications. An outsider’s perspective, heterodox views, curiosity, and radical play bring us closer to the polysemic, polymorphic nature of both reality and creativity. It is also true, however, that liminality of any kind cannot exist indefinitely without some sort of restabilization, and the creative process accommodates this step as well—for a time. Having

jester persona in juxtaposition with the imagination in action through the creative process, the one might illuminate the other. If the coincidences are fruitful, they make us think and see again. They guide us, in other words, to our own more robust perspective from which to see, seek, and act creatively, to feel empowered in the everyday creation of new meaning even as we journey through spaces of heightened uncertainty. Such goals are in keeping with the subversive spirit of the jester. Standing apart, unraveling and weaving together what is, was, and could be, he explores countless provisional paths and spins play into possibilities.

If we risk following our curiosity beyond the relative safety of a frame, myriad unpredictable frames and antiframes arise, each with as many entry points as gatekeepers. Here, the key to moving forward lies in permitting oneself access to the itinerant life of the imagination. Like contemporary licensed fools, then, we might more often challenge and expand existing limits on thought and experience, counteracting the numbing pressures of standardization with contingency, experimentation, and play. Ideally, education policy makers, too, would validate and incorporate this process across disciplines and for all students. Taking a cue from Walter Benjamin's advocacy of room-for-play (*Spielraum*) in art, we must "wage an aesthetics of play" to foster the kind of flexible, creative thinking that is essential for thriving globally in the years ahead.¹⁷

The jester's complex role reflects this attitude of urgency and universal agency. The jester interrupts sameness, agitates conventional understandings, and becomes a means of change. Using play and chance, the crazy wisdom of intuition, and the open-endedness of imagination to navigate multiple truths, we, like our metaphorical guide, destroy stagnant worlds and become cultural creators of new ones. In these times when rationalism has all but driven out the belief in inspired fools and spontaneous play, we could do worse than follow the jester's path.

NOTES

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