

Journey of the Fool

An Interview With Kathy Bernstein

By Paula Sager

"The lower universe, like the body of man, is but a garment, a motley costume, well likened to cap and bells. Beneath the garments of the fool is the divine substance, however, of which the Fool is but a shadow; this world is a Mardi Gras—a pageantry of divine sparks masked in the garb of Fools."

-Manly P. Hall

I first met Kathy Bernstein three years ago when she moved into the office-space next to mine. Kathy is a Barbara Brennan Healing practitioner and a numerologist. She is currently in advanced training in Integrated Kabbalistic Healing with Jason Shulman.

After some conversations about our work, we decided to exchange bodywork sessions. We sat down to talk about how we would proceed and found ourselves, quite spontaneously, in a very different process. Since then we've met regularly to explore what happens when we meet "in relationship." We sit facing each other, eyes mostly open but free to close. We agree to be attentive to what shows up second by second, via physical movement and stillness, sensation, and emotion. We each verbalize what is happening for us as we feel the impulse to speak. Our intention is to be present, without trying to change or fix anything in our self or the other. In reflecting on the process, I tend to talk about what we do in terms of mover and witness, while Kathy speaks of it in terms of numbers. We've found that her language of the ancient systems of numerology and the Tarot has surprising resonance with my language of Authentic Movement.

When we meet in this way, Kathy sometimes says, "we're going into the unknown, the domain of the Fool." Wanting to learn more, I asked and she agreed to talk about her understanding of the Fool in the following interview. As our conversation progressed we came to a point where we seemed to hit a wall and found ourselves lost. We knew the only place to go was into that process of being in relationship to the unknown. What emerged was surprising but also consistent with our subject at hand, the Fool. We decided to include this experience within the interview format in hopes that the dynamic that came through in our personal process will add to an understanding of the Fool's journey.

Paula: How did you come to be so interested in numbers?

Kathy: My fascination with numbers began when I was quite young. While walking along a railroad track, I saw the number 37 stamped on the head of a tack in a railroad tie, and knew in that moment that numbers were about more than arithmetic. And in that same moment, I instantly knew that God was much, much

greater than the limited view I had been taught. Being a child at the time, this vast unknowable experience was not a problem for me. There was no desire to scratch any deeper, or try to explain it; I never even told anyone about it.

In the 1970's I came across my first book on numerology and felt like a duck waddling into a pond for the very first time. This encounter with numerology rekindled my childhood sense of connection between numbers and God. It seemed to me that if numbers represent sequence—and what could be more primal than sequence?—then, if I went back as far as I could in understanding that sequence, wouldn't I find the vastness I had experienced as a child?

Paula: What exactly do you mean when you talk about "the Fool" and what does the Fool have to do with numbers?

Kathy: As a numerologist I also work with the Major Arcana of the Tarot, the first twenty-two cards of the entire Tarot series. The visual images of these cards correspond to specific numbers, from one to twenty-one. The Fool is the only card belonging to the Major Arcana that is not numbered, but it has come to be interpreted by Tarot scholars as representing both zero and twenty-two, or the beginning and end of the Major Arcana. The Fool's image on a traditional card shows a jester with a small dog nipping at his heels. Many (but not all) interpretations of the card hold that the dog is urging reason and logic on the jester as he is about to walk off the edge of a cliff into the abyss. I understand the abyss to represent the Void, the number zero.

Paula: What does this image mean to you?

Kathy: The Fool, like each of us, starts at zero, the Void, emptiness. The Void is teeming with life as yet un-manifest, like the unfertilized egg. Zero, like the egg, is not passive; by reaching out and actively drawing to itself the active male force, i.e., the sperm, it serves as the impetus for the primal movement of the creation process. There are parallels here in the child's separation from its mother, what we sometimes call the individuation process. The energy of the active princi-

ple of the mother draws and pulls the child back towards herself, even as the child follows its own inner drive towards a separate sense of self. This separation process is full of the fear of being pulled back into the primal abyss and losing all identity.

The swallowing up on the part of zero sets the stage for the Fool's Journey through the Major Arcana, which represent our archetypal life experiences. Every aspect of this journey is holy, and it is the Fool in us, the Unknown Knower, who brings the wise flexibility, literally, the "foolishness" we need to pass through these life experiences.

P: This place of initial movement reminds me of the moment in Authentic Movement practice when we face the potent emptiness and wait for a first impulse to move. Sometimes I've experienced an energetic sense of being pulled right into the empty circle or movement.

K: Yes, that's the active draw. I think that the central core of who we are is at the heart of this movement. Let's slow this movement down and look at the parts. As I said, the zero actively draws to itself the active male force; the egg literally reaches out energetically and draws the sperm towards it. The active male force, the sperm that vivifies the egg, is the number one. If you look at Zero and One visually, you see the egg and the sperm. In numerology the number one represents the first step, the spark of life and light. In Genesis, on the first day of creation, God says "Let there be light." It's the light (1) that is swallowed up by the darkness of the void (0). According to Manly P. Hall, the divine sparks (light) are beneath the garments of the Fool. We deny the central core of who we are, this divine substance, because of our fearful response to the active draw, the swallowing up by the egg, which continues in the individuation process with the mother. This response to the swallowing up is the primal stuff of our defenses.

P: I'm trying to picture this in the context of entering the circle in Authentic Movement: so when I follow the pull into the empty space, I'm letting myself be swallowed.

K: And I think the only way you can let yourself be swallowed is because you've already taken the Fool's Journey, meaning you've had sufficient life experiences and enough ego strength, that it's now safe to return to the potent emptiness. The Fool's Journey is the move out from the Void. We have to leave in order to live; it's about survival. We have to separate and learn how to be in relationship to Mom and everyone and everything else that comes our way, and so the dance begins.

P: Tell me about this dance.

K: I think the dance has parts, or what I might call milestones. The first milestone on the Fool's journey is the number four (4), the square, which is the Emperor in the Major Arcana. The number four represents the first breath of air, for breath only exists in form. With this first breath the infant begins the separation from the mother, while still being totally dependent on her. The question, which comes from the infant's kinesthetic sense of its world, is, "How do I be with what's here? How do I survive in form?" On some level the infant loses itself in order to be in relationship to "mother." In the major arcana, this card, the number 4, is the first reference to form. It's about being-in-matter, which requires taking on form. Things are distinctly black and white, and logic abides here: "this feels good"; "this feels bad." The infant constantly makes adjustments towards or away from the positive or negative experiences it encounters. The Emperor (at any age) sees everything in this black or white view.



The next milestone is the number thirteen (13), the Box, which is the Death card (representing death and transformation) in the Major Arcana. Eventually we realize that the defense structures that we set up in order to survive and feel safe are making us feel boxed-in and restricted in our lives. Here we begin to realize that we're lost. It is our suffering that brings us to this place. The question arises, "Where is this suffering coming from?" When you decide to explore this, you discover you have an unconscious and a willingness to go into it because your goal is to end the suffering. The number 13 in the Tarot is about the valuable work of learning our particular story or history and the opportunity to see what keeps us from living our life. Here, we come into relationship with black and white and realize that somehow black and white are related.



We're looking to end our suffering, and so we imagine there's a place we can get to where we can finally be better and our suffering will be gone. This is our quest as we continue the journey. But where does this divine process lead us? It brings us to the Fool's doorstep, number twenty-two (22). Remember the image of the Fool as a jester about to walk off the edge into the abyss? Imagine it, you travel all this way, only to have the Fool lead you right back to zero, the Void. You think you finally get it, and you're on your way to Wholeness, but then you meet the Fool! Surprise, surprise! He takes you back to where it all began!

He's the rule breaker, the joker, the one who changes the direction of the game. Like the Jack-in-the-Box, you never know when he's going to pop up. It's



not about looking for a perfect ending or having a preference for inside or out. From the Fool's perspective, duality is one, nothing is a danger, because everything's included. Therefore you can honestly start from exactly where you are, be it the Emperor or Death—they're both holy—and be in relationship from

there. Here you discover that you're not trying to solve something but be exquisitely in relationship to whatever is present, be it a moment of ecstasy or a painful awareness of lack. Returning to the void is really returning to where life springs from, where everything is, the known and unknown parts of ourselves.

P: So while the sequential numbers would suggest that this journey is linear, it seems that you're saying the Fool can bring us to zero at any point.

K: It's actually much more holographic. Once you've got past the 4 and 13 and get to the 22, the Fool's doorstep, the process ceases to be a journey of progression and shifts to an openness in body, mind & spirit; a willingness to be present to our openness and our closedness. That's when the journey shifts into a holographic experience where anything can show up at any time and there is the opportunity to be in relationship to the obstacles that keep us separate. It's about being willing to be with the unknown parts of oneself, and to be present for what is hidden and what is not. It's being with all of who we are that puts us in relationship with the divine substance of the Fool. This divine substance can't really be known and yet is at the core of who we are.

P: Can you say more about the connection between the three milestones of 4, 13, and 22?

K: In numerology you reduce numbers to a single digit, but you still look at what that number was reduced from. For example, the number twenty-two would be reduced to one digit by adding $2 + 2 = 4$. If you took the number thirteen and reduced it to one digit you would also get the number 4. ($1 + 3 = 4$) What the Emperor, The Death card and The Fool have in common is that reduced, they each equal the number four. What I see in my numerology practice is that when I find the Fool in a person's numerological chart, I almost always find the Emperor and Death. Or, when I find Death I also find the Fool and the Emperor. I have not seen this with the other cards in the Major Arcana that reduce to a same number. I believe that the

numbers 4, 13, and 22 are all aspects of the same fabric. In order to understand the qualities of each of the three, I describe them separately, but no matter how evolved any of us are, they all show up in each of us.

P: So if the qualities of 4, 13, and 22 are all present in the same fabric, how does that play out in our lives?

K: Here's the thing, we're never going to find purity here on earth. We're going to be in the 4 of the Emperor, where the black and white are split, because we're human. And then we're in 13, where without even realizing it we're on a quest to resolve something. You do all your work, you separate from your mother, you know your story, you're on this quest, and you get to the Fool and he says I'm going to take you back to the beginning, the Void. Just saying that, I can feel my chest get heavy and I can't breathe. One of the reasons we don't want to enter the unknown is that we fear we'll be swallowed up by the void. Right now I can feel something stirring in me as we talk about this. I think what's happening here is that I'm trying to stay in the rational world, but I'm slipping. I feel lost.

Long Silence

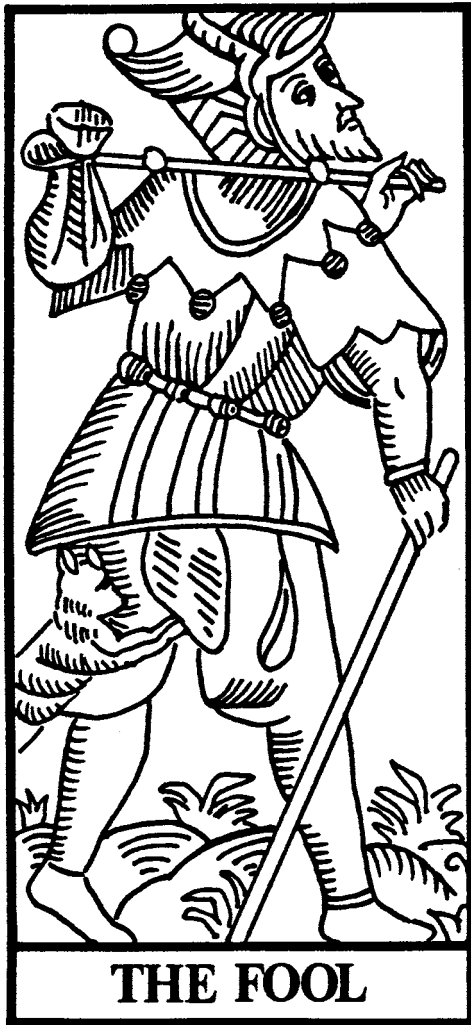
At this point we both feel increasingly uncomfortable, both physically and in our ability to comprehend where the interview is going. It is difficult to continue without acknowledging this. We agree to continue by letting our felt experience come to the foreground of the conversation. As we sit facing each other, we feel ourselves dropping into our practice of being "in relationship," where we become more aware of what is present in our bodies. We let ourselves also be in relationship to each other. There is a shift that feels as though the flat, linear mode of rational thought opens to a fuller and more dimensional experience.

P: What do you experience right now?

K: I'm frustrated because I felt like I just experienced a huge piece of understanding and then it disappeared, totally gone. And I feel hot with this thing, right here in my chest.

P: What I am feeling right now is how hard it is to figure this out mentally. Like you described, it's here and then it's gone. Something else is wanting to be included, and I need to more consciously shift into my body to pay attention.

K: The Fool is here. The question is where are we? I have some trepidation, but let's follow it. It feels like we're entering the Void.



AGGHRGgh. I feel a growling.

P: I feel the boxed-in sensation, like my clothes don't fit right.

K: I know I am never going to get comfortable right now. How could a perfect God come up with such a horrible ending?

P: What's the ending?

K: The ending simply can't be defined, we're being asked to go into the unknown. I feel the part of me that's kicking and screaming at the prospect of not being able to solve this. How can I be with that?

P: In this moment I actually feel a certain relief that I can be more present. I didn't know where I was before and just felt constriction and a dense fog coming over me.

K: I am so angry (*whispered*), it's like the Cosmic Joke.

P: Why do my eyes want to close when you say that?

Oh, it's not just my eyes closing. It's like my eyes are burned out and sealed shut. As if a voice were saying, "You cannot see this. It is completely inaccessible to you." Is this what the Fool brings to us, the realization that no matter how much we want to know and understand we will never know it all?

K: Never. How could we possibly know, it has to be concealed.

P: So here I am, the mover. Just like in Authentic Movement, I am the mover with my eyes closed. I'm here, just waiting and my eyes have been sealed shut, so clearly I'm not going to find anything outside myself. The only place to turn at this point is inside, to feel what is here in this body right now.

K: One of the images of the Fool is he is blindfolded as he wanders.

P: I am just going to keep waiting until I feel an impulse.

Ah! Right now what I feel very strongly are my open hands and a sense that somewhere there is a coin.

K: If I don't steal it!

P: Oh! (*eyes open*). I see you!

Silence

P: It was so startling to hear you say, "unless I steal it." It's one thing to be in the unknown with myself but to be in the unknown with myself and now to see you and feel the unfathomable unknown of what you are, is shocking.

K: Oh, the heaviness in my chest is changing. It's lighter.

We think we know who someone else is. What do we really know? It's amazing we do as well as we do in this world.

P: Yes. My hands feel like claws. They could scratch your eyes out.

K: We are in the unknowable all the time and don't even realize it.

P: There is something important about this impulse to (*growls*) attack and defend. It's like an animal response to the unknowable of the other. Strangely there is something satisfying about feeling it if only because it's engaging, yet it feels like a sub-human response. I don't even know what the true human impulse would be in this moment. But already, in saying that, something is changing.

Silence

P: What is that expression you've used, the Unknown Knower?

K: It is the unknown part of me that knows.

P: Right now my question is, can I tolerate letting the Unknown Knower be here.

K: My first response is, off with his head. I am so angry.

P: I am feeling indifference to your anger, but still curious.

K: Don't worry, everything is welcome here.

Paula and Kathy laugh.

K: My rage is about how hidden the unknown feels right now. I have pain in my diaphragm. I'm feeling as if I have a stick that I am gouging into the wet sand at the ocean.

P: Digging?

K: Digging with a stick. I am talking another language. I am arguing with God.

P: I just feel a sleepiness. Uhhhh.... I am being pulled under, under water. Head so heavy.

K: I hate to even say this, but I have absolutely no regard for where you're at. I have this image of holding your head under water.

P: When I hear that, I know I am alone, yet I don't feel alone. I know you are here. Somehow I am using the image of your hand against my head, holding me under.

K: I can't imagine why I am so violent. I have no idea what this has to do...

P: My impulse is to let the intensity of where you are be in the (imagined) hand that is on my head holding me down. For me it intensifies my own state of submersion and I feel so much more present. I feel the sinking but I'm alert and aware of the dynamic of these two energies interacting.

K: I feel like a beast that can't get what it's looking for. It's so frustrated even the killing doesn't satisfy what that is at the bottom of me.

P: *(Groan)* I'm pulling you in. I'm pulling you down. *(This is an internal energetic sensation, not a physical movement.)*

K: It's true. Do you know how true that is?

P: I'm trying to just stay with this and not figure it out. Let's just go with it. It's like scuba diving, we're going down together.

K: I'm turning white, becoming waterlogged. I wonder if anything means anything...My heart....

P: I feel like one of those coral-like plants on the bottom of the ocean, swaying. The water is moving right through me.

K: It feels like we're in this thick ooze. Nothing matters, not that I'm indifferent, it could be either way, it doesn't matter. The back of my neck is on fire, extreme heat.

P: I feel a kind of deadpan quality AND so much is going on, like a Buster Keaton moment. Like when he's standing on the ground and the front of his house falls on him and the doorway passes over him and he's still standing motionless and unscathed.

At this point we notice that the palpable quality of presence in relationship is changing. We begin speaking in more reflective tones, less from within the felt experience.

K: It's a perspective I'm not used to having. I have the image of God looking down and the world doesn't seem so bleak. It's amazing that we get along as well as we do considering the possibilities of what we can see and experience outside ourselves. What do we know about another human being? We assume so much and we think we know so much.

P: Well that's a whole different road we could travel down, looking at that image of God looking down. I mean, talk about an external witness. How can we be



in relationship to that? What we're doing right now is giving each other the practice of being seen by an external witness.

K: But is God our creation because we can't tolerate the unresolvable? If we go back to the very thing that gave us creation, we have to see that it's unknown, because if we knew it we couldn't exist. So we come back to it and realize that it is unknowable and that's the gift!

Kathy and Paula laugh.

P: Yes, a gift! It reminds me of how much I hate the feeling of being pulled into the unconscious state. It's like an anesthesia comes over me, but I'm learning that I can actually be with that and become conscious of my unconsciousness. Then it becomes a very different and alive experience. But the urge to fight that surrender is so strong.

K: Right, the peril.

P: So if we do it and go with it...

K: Like we did. And I felt angry and you were in a different kind of place and yet we rode it together.

P: When we can get past that initial "fight or flight" response to each other and actually start seeing that each of us is in a different place and yet we're allowing both to be here, something very different can happen. Invariably something shifts for each of us separately and together, then we go a little deeper and we're deep in the unknown. But we welcome that, because this place will help us take the next step.

K: This is what just happened. We didn't know where we were going, but we stayed with it, not trying to change or fix it. I didn't like how I felt, sadness comes up when I just mention that feeling of how angry I was, and I did not want to be there, but I knew I had to stay with it because that's what was there. The thing is to honestly be with where you're at.

In spite of all our fears, it's the unknown that holds the potential for all of creation. Being in relationship means being in the unknown, so of course we resist it. It's terrifying and this is the reason for creat-

ing our defense structures in the first place. It's helpful for me to know why the unknown scares me so much.

P: And why there's such a charge around situations that make us feel foolish or not in control.

K: The Fool will do anything to help us heal the split of duality; actually he doesn't have to do anything. He holds duality as one thing not two. For him there is no forward or backward, no up or down. The Holy Fool, who really can't be described, holds everything. We're learning how to tolerate the Unknown Knower in ourselves and in our relationships with others.

P: I wonder if the Unknown Knower is the same as what we in Authentic Movement call "the internal witness." For me the phrase Unknown Knower evokes a feeling I know from Authentic Movement, of experience unfolding. It's the sense that when I close my eyes not knowing what will happen next, something always comes to meet me.

K: Even though we may not have a clue what the phrase Unknown Knower means, it still resonates within us as a hidden truth. When we have enough ego strength that we can be free enough to not listen to the ego, we can return to the potent emptiness of the Void. When we jump into the unknown something always rises to meet us. The jumping off and the rising up are one thing not two, just as the Unknown and the Knower are one. This is the living paradox the Fool leads us to. The Fool brings us back to the Void, because as Manly P. Hall says, that's where the divine sparks are held. What covers the light are all the things we have trouble being in relationship to. When we come into relationship with the garment, our bodies, we can experience the divine sparks within, the aliveness of our humanity. ○

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